

# Place names of Russia's minorities in Estonian usage

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# Content

- Handling of foreign place names in Estonian (in general)
- Brief introduction to name usage during Soviet occupation
  - transcription rules for several Soviet republics
  - Russia's place names via Russian (some exceptions for Karelia)
- 1990s: first principles or policies developed
- 2021: transcription rules for some Finno-Ugrian languages
- 2025: new set of principles being approved

# Foreign place names in Estonian

- Usage of foreign names is a purely linguistic matter; no official decisions are made regarding the spelling or choice of names.
- Spelling standards are approved by the Language Committee (*keeletoimkond*) of the Mother Tongue Society. This includes also the principles of writing foreign names.
- In practice, the names as found in the Dictionary of Standard Estonian (ÕS) are considered as 'standard' names.
- As a rule, foreign geographical names are written as they are in the original Latin (Roman) script. Non-Latin names are romanized according to international or Estonian own systems.
- A number of exonyms remain in usage.

# During Soviet occupation

- Usage of Russian names was regulated by transcription rules established by the Language Committee (VÕK, *vabariiklik õigekeelsuskomisjon*).
- 1975–1977 transcription rules were established for Armenian, Azerbaijani, Belarusian, Georgian, Kazakh, Kirghiz, Tajik, Turkmen, Ukrainian and Uzbek names.
- Place names regarding these languages in encyclopaedia were still written via Russian but some names of writers had national forms as variants:  
***Tšingiz Aitmatov*** (*Tšõngõz Ajtmatov*).
- No rules were given for Moldovan nor for the languages in Russia.
- Names for places in Russia were always taken via Russian but occasional exceptions were accepted for Karelia, e.g. ***Petrozavodsk*** (*Petroskoi*).
- In 1980s–1990s some exonyms were discarded, e.g. Ufaa → Ufa, Kaluuga → Kaluga.

# 1990s: first principles

- Transcription rules for the former Soviet republics were implemented fully, without any intermediate languages.
- In principle, names in minority languages of Russia were also given in the local form, e.g. **Ufa** (*Öfö*), **Vladikavkaz** (*Dzäudžököu*).
- No new transcription rules were approved but as necessary, *ad hoc* rules based on the existing ones were applied.
- The main name forms for Russia's places came via Russian but for Karelia, Finnish names were applied when available, **Karhumäki** (*Medvežjegorsk*).
- If a language switched over to Latin script, the name forms were taken from the original script, e.g. Turkmen **Aşgabat** (earlier *Aşgabat* ~ *Aşhabad*), Azerbaijani **Gəncə** ~ *Gäncä* (earlier *Gjändžä* ~ *Gandža*), Uzbek **Andijon** (earlier *Andidžon* ~ *Andidžan*). This applied also to names in Chechen or Tatar, e.g. *Sölza-Gala* (Groznõi), *Alabuğa* (Jelabuga).

# 1991–2025

- The main form of place names inside Russia were still Russian names but minority names were added in brackets.
- 2021 the Language Committee approved the rules of transcription for Erzya, Komi, Mari, Moksha and Udmurt.

# 2025: new set of principles

- The Language Committee has discussed and approved in principle some changes for the names in Russia:
  - Russian name form stays the main name form in general;
  - in Finno-Ugrian republics, the main name form is the one in the local language with the Russian names as variants, e.g., Erzya/Mordovian **Ordanbuje** (*Ardatov*), Karelian/Finnish **Petroskoi** (*Petrozavodsk*), Komi **Ukva** (*Ukhta*), Mari **Julser-Ola** (*Volžsk*), Moksha/Mordovian **Orozaj** (*Ruzajevka*), Udmurt **Ižkar** (*Iževsk*);
  - the same priority is given to Votic and Izhorian names in their autochthonous areas of distribution, e.g. Votic **Jõgõperä** (*Krakolje*).
- National and historic place names are given as variants:
  - in the Karelian isthmus, e.g. **Võssotsk** (*Uuras*);
  - in East Prussia, e.g. **Kaliningrad** (*Königsberg*);
  - in Ingria, e.g. **Gattšina** (*Hatsina*);
  - in the other autonomous republics, e.g. **Gorno-Altajsk** (*Ulalu*), **Jakutsk** (*Djokuuskaj*), **Tšeboksarõ** (*Šupaškar*), **Ulan-Ude** (*Ulaan Üde*).

# Implementation

- The principles have not yet been widely publicized, so the implementation remains at the very modest level.
- In the Finno-Ugrian republics there are also many Russian place names which make the general picture not so uniform, sometimes there are questions whether a certain name is Russian or the local name; some names can produce differing forms depending on the conversion rules applied, e.g. Udmurt Кайсашур → *Kajsašur*, Russian Кайсашур → *Kaissašur*.