



Information regarding the standardization of geographical names in Lithuania (2022)

The State Commission of the Lithuanian Language is responsible for the standardization of the official language (Lithuanian), including the standardization of geographical names.

So far there have been no changes in the Law on the State Language (1995), therefore, the place names in official usage should be written in the official language of Lithuania and on standardized forms.

The Commission mostly acts as a consultative body, gives answers to institutions and citizens, evaluates proposals, drafts, and complaints, and also gives conclusions to the authorities approving the official names of settlements, streets, lakes, streams, ponds, etc. Official requests mostly come from the local municipalities concerning the names of settlements, streets, parks, etc.; also, from the Environmental Protection Agency (under the Ministry of Environment) about the hydronyms; citizens also ask various questions.

In 2022 the Commission gave answers to approximately 140 questions about toponyms: about 80 street names, 4 hydronyms, also a few names of parks, bridges, stadiums, and schools, as well as inquiries about foreign place names – transcription, grammaticalization, exonyms. The total number of consultations remained approximately the same as in recent years. The following can be distinguished:

- the new regulations on mandatory coordination of new names of rivers or lakes in the Regulations of the Cadaster of rivers and lakes (approved by the Government); plus, one instance of rediscovering the name of a lake from 19th-century documents;
- disagreement with one municipal administration regarding the formation and spelling of the names of a few streets and bridges;
- increased media and public attention to the Ukrainian forms of Ukraine toponyms and discussions about remaining Soviet street names in Lithuania.

Now more about each issue mentioned above.

Hydronyms

There is one legislative change worth mentioning. According to the new version of the Regulations of the state cadaster of rivers, lakes, and ponds of the Republic of Lithuania approved by the Government in 2022, before entering or changing the name of a river or a lake in the cadastral database the cadastral manager (Environmental Protection Agency) applies to the State Lithuanian Language Commission for a conclusion on the name of this cadastral object. The Commission, upon receiving a request from the Cadaster administrator to provide a conclusion on the name of a cadastral object, submits it within 10 work days.

According to the first version of the Regulations, the spelling of names should be checked in dictionaries, and name changes should be coordinated with the State Lithuanian Language Commission. From 2004 to 2022, coordination was retained in practice between institutions but was not required by the Regulations. Apparently that coordination was useful, and that was the reason for the Cadaster administrator to initiate putting it back to the Regulations of the Cadaster.

Last year, the Commission received one request about the name of a lake and the names of three rivers. The names of the rivers were approved and remained as they had been already in sources and usage: *Gir̃nupalis*, *Serbentìnė*, *Žeinupỹs*. The question about the name of the lake in the territory of Širvintos municipality (quite close to the capital city of Vilnius) was raised by a specialist from the Directorate of the Kernavė State Cultural Reserve.

It can be noted that the official name of that lake *Paežerėlio ežeras* is quite strange: the appellative *ežeras* means 'lake', *ežerėlis* 'a small lake', the proper name *Pa-ežerėlis* (Gen. *Paežerėlio*) 'settlement that is situated near the lake', so the name of the lake *Paežerėlio ežeras* means 'lake of the settlement, which is situated near the lake'. It can be assumed that the real proper name of the lake had been forgotten but was discovered in historical documents (1831, 1847 etc.). That name is quite beautiful – *Delnas* (: *delnas* 'palm'). The Lithuanian toponym was written in Polish or Russian. It was mentioned by Władysław Syrokomla in the second volume of *Wycieczki po Litwie w promieniach od Wilna* (1860): „jezioro *Dełna* (*dłon*) z pięciu rozgałęzieniami“. The place name *Padelnas* (урочище *Паделнасъ*) near Lake *Delnas* (*Озеро Делнасъ*) was recorded on the 1847 map of Kernavė. *Pa-delnas* is the same type of derivation as the current name *Pa-ežerėlis*. The final decision was to enter the rediscovered name *Delnas* as a variant in the Cadaster: *Paežerėlio ežeras (Delnas)*.

Street names

There are some criteria for naming streets, buildings, etc. The criteria are set in the Description of the procedure for assigning, changing, and recording names of streets, buildings, structures, and other objects approved by the order of the Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Lithuania.

According to the latest version of the Description, names should meet the following requirements:

1. have to be linguistically correct;
2. must not disturb public safety or public order, not to incite national, racial, religious or social hatred, violence or discrimination;
3. names that are formed with toponyms:
 - 3.1. to be in an official and normative form (extinct toponyms need to be only in normative forms);
 - 3.2. to be chosen by giving priority to the names of the local endangered or extinct toponyms;
4. place names with personal names have to be chosen when evaluating the outstanding public service of those people for the history, science, art, culture, politics and other fields of the public life of the state of Lithuania;
5. names related to historical, cultural events (dates), and places need to be significant for the state of Lithuania.

Street names are given considering the recommendations of the State Commission for the Lithuanian Language regarding the compilation and writing of street names (Clause 13 of the Description). The Commission, in turn, has prepared linguistic Recommendations for the formation and writing of street names (2004) and has given answers about new street names for the local municipalities at their request. Last year the Commission received requests from 11 municipalities (out of 60) about approximately 80 street names.

There are cases when the Commission additionally applies to the Ministry of Culture or the Institute of Lithuanian History regarding the compatibility of names with non-linguistic criteria. But the disagreement mentioned at the beginning was not related to the signification of events or people.

Last year the Commission had to inform the manager of the Address register that some street names, approved by the Vilnius City Municipality, are linguistically incorrect and cannot be entered into the Address Register. That has happened just once in my practice. At first, the Commission informed the municipal administration how to form and write the names of streets and bridges. It is inappropriate to write them in the same way as the names of works of art, magazines, or organizations. But the municipality was trying to do exactly that: to form and write some street (paths) and bridge names in quotation marks, not in the genitive case as it is usual. The manager of the Address register refused to put such incorrect street names on the register. The local communities near the Vilnia River – the communities of Užupis district and Markučiai district – have also voiced opposition to such a plan of naming bridges. Therefore, the municipality will review its decision about the names of that few bridges too.

Some street names in various settlements of Lithuania gained attention in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. There was no doubt about the decision of Vilnius municipality to rename the address of the embassy of the Russian Federation: part of the street was named after the Heroes of Ukraine (*Ukrainos Didvyrių g.*) in 2022. (The square was named after Boris Nemtsov (*Boriso Nemcovo skveras*) in 2018.)

But there are still such names of streets in the country: 7 *Tarybų* (: *taryba* ‘Soviet council’), 3 *Kolūkiečių* (: *kolūkietis* ‘collective farmer’, *kolūkis* ‘Kolkhoz’), and 1 *Komunary* (: *komunaras* ‘communard’). The meaning of the name *Tarybų g.* is probably blurred, covered by the Lithuanian appellative *taryba* meanings, it is also used in the current context, eg.: *savivaldybės Taryba* (Council of a municipality), *Europos Taryba* (European Council).

Some municipalities held consultations and population surveys last year. Most of the street names of that type were replaced after the restoration of independence in 1990, and some were replaced in 2022, but not everyone wants to change the names reminiscent of the Soviet occupation. It seems that changing the remaining controversial street names could be more difficult than removing monuments dedicated to Soviet soldiers or Soviet writers. A few of them that have remained until now – monuments to Soviet soldiers or Soviet writers – were removed or covered up in 2022.

The names of several institutions were also changed or probably will be changed, for example, *Maksim Gorky School* (Russian-language school in Klaipėda) > *Uostamiesčio Progymnasium* (: *uostamiestis* ‘port city’); *Russian Drama Theatre of Lithuania* > *The Old Theater of Vilnius*; *Pushkin Memorial Museum (Puskino Memorialinis Muziejus)* has been renamed by the toponym of that old area – *Markučiai Manor Museum (Markučių muziejus)*.

There is no de-Sovietization law in Lithuania. In 1991, Aukščiausioji Taryba (Supreme Council) formed a working group to formulate a draft law on de-Sovietization, but it was not drafted or passed. Certainly, de-Sovietization was carried out, it just took its course.

One more thing should be mentioned in this context. According to the Law on the Territorial Administrative Units and Their Boundaries, there are the following territorial administrative units of the Republic of Lithuania: county (*apskritis*) and municipality (*savivaldybė*). The term *savivaldybė* (municipality) instead of the Soviet term *rajonas* (district). But there are some names of municipalities up with this Soviet relic, eg. *Biržai district municipality*, *Zarasai district municipality*. At the end of 2022, the Language Commission and the Ministry of the Interior supported the initiative to change such names omitting the word *rajonas*. The initiative came

from one of the members of the municipal council, but it has not yet been approved by the Seimas. Municipal elections are being held in March 2023. It remains to be seen whether we will see some changes.

In addition, some words about onomastic sources and foreign place names.

News from the Institute of the Lithuanian Language

There has been some progress with the sources of toponyms at the Institute of the Lithuanian Language. The fourth volume (I-J) of the Dictionary of Lithuanian Toponyms was published at the end of 2021, and the fifth volume (K) is being edited. The Language Commission financially supports the publishing of that dictionary and the new project of the Institute as well. In 2022–2024, the questionnaires of the interwar Lithuanian land nomenclature of the counties of Mažeikiai, Telšiai, Kretinga and Tauragė should be digitized, and scientific research of the data provided in the questionnaires should be carried out.

The Geoinformational Database of Lithuanian Toponyms (LVvGDB) was integrated into the Lithuanian Language Resource Information System <https://ekalba.lt> in 2020. But there has been no progress in this field.

Foreign place names

Change in the List of Country Names (2022): the official name of Guyana:

Gajanos Respublika > *Gajanos Kooperacinė Respublika*.

Changes in the List of the Names of Capital Cities (2022):

capital of Australia: *Canberra* – *Kanberà* > *Kánbera* (accentuation in Lithuanian);

capital of Kazakhstan: *Nùr Sultānas* (*Нұр-Сұлтан*) > *Astanà* (*Астана*);

capital of Ukraine: *Kijevas* > *Kýjivas*, *Kijevas* (1. transcribed from Ukrainian – Київ; 2) exonym).

The linguists recognized the names of *Kijevas*, *Lvovas*, *Zaporožė* as exonyms or exonymic forms of Ukraine toponyms that have had a tradition of usage in the Lithuanian language for hundreds of years. But in the context of the war, Lithuanian people are willing to support Ukrainians in every possible way. So, both forms – transcribed from Ukrainian *Kyjivas*, *Lvivas*, *Zaporižia* and exonymic – could be used in Lithuanian as well.

The List of the new names of residential areas in Ukraine was edited in 2016: about 900 place names were taken from the resolution passed by the Verkhovna Rada based on the Ukrainian Law on Decommunization. The list includes the former and current Ukrainian toponyms and their forms transcribed in Lithuanian. Some new recommendations were added in 2022.

One of the main sources of world place names in Lithuanian is the five-volume dictionary Word Place Names (published by the Science and Encyclopaedias Publishing Centre in 2006–2014 with the Commission's support); it is digitalized: <http://pasaulio-varldai.vlkk.lt> and <https://vietovardziai.melc.lt>). Most of the toponyms of Ukraine are given in the form transcribed from Ukrainian, eg. *Городськ* – *Nòrodskas*, *Лохвиця* – *Lòchvycia*, *Кам'янка* – *Kámjanka*; some of them are given in two variants, eg.: *Львів* – *Lvovas* / *Lvivas*. (See <http://pasaulio-varldai.vlkk.lt/salys/ukraina/>). There is a tendency even in that case to use the Ukrainian form of a place name.

Some citizens and journalists express their attitude toward the country-aggressor in a graphic way: they write the name of that country in lowercase: not *Rusija* (Россия), but *rusija*.

Last but not least – direct train service from Vilnius to Warsaw and Kraków was launched in December 2022. Before that the Lithuanian railway administration (now LTG Link) coordinated the names of railway stations with the linguistic recommendations. The list of the rail stations for Lithuanian citizens is given in two forms: *Suvalkai / Suwałki, Augustavas / Augustów, Dambava / Dąbrowa Białostocka, Tluščius / Tłuszcz, Volominas / Wołomin; Varšuva (Rytinė stotis) / Warszawa Wschodnia, Krokuva (Pagrindinė stotis) / Kraków Główny.*

We enjoy good connections and good communication. I am very grateful to you for your invitation and the opportunity to visit the beautiful city of Warsaw.

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