

UNIFORM POLICY FOR HANDLING GEOGRAPHIC NAMES

International Hydrographic Bureau - Circular-Letter No. 16-H of 1948

Reference : I.H.B. Circular-Letter No. 6-H of 18th September 1947

Monte-Carlo, 18th September 1948.

Sir,

Your attention is again invited to the following Resolution adopted at the Vth International Hydrographic Conference concerning the proposal of United States relative to a uniform policy for handling geographic names on nautical charts and in hydrographic texts,

« The Committee (Work of the Bureau) recommended the proposal and expressed as its opinion that consideration be given to the adoption of a uniform policy for the handling of geographic names on nautical charts and in hydrographic texts and that the Directing Committee should address a Circular-Letter to States Members on the subject. »

In compliance with this Directive, International Hydrographic Bureau Circular-Letter No. 6-H of 1947, was forwarded to all Member and non Member States on 18th September 1947.

To insure that the widest consideration be given to this subject by a representative number of States, the Bureau also forwarded, Circular-Letter No. 7-H of 24th February 1948 on the same subject which contained a copy of the Romanisation Table of the various Russian Letters received from the French Hydrographer and furnished by their Naval Attaché in Moscow which is of more recent date than the one published in 1931 by the International Hydrographic Bureau. (*Hydrographic Review*, vol. VIII, No. 1, p. 194.)

The following replies which have been received by the Bureau in accordance with paragraph 6 of Circular-Letter No. 6-H of 1947 on this subject are furnished the States Members for consideration.

The following States Members and non Member States have signified their general agreement to the proposals with such comment as is extracted :—

ARGENTINA : No comment.

AUSTRALIA : Accepts draft proposals 1 and 5 applicable to own coast as Australian charting is restricted to areas surrounding Australia.

BELGIUM : Not applicable.

CHINA : No comments at this time.

DENMARK : Agrees in general, with following remarks :—

The Danish place-names are shown in agreement with the publications of the Danish Place Name Committee. As regards foreign place names we have already adopted the spelling used by the country having sovereignty even for the old Danish districts which now belong to Germany and where Danish names were used before 1864.

I regret that I have been so late in answering your letter but the matter had to be discussed with the Danish Place Names Committee as far as the names in South Schleswig are concerned.

With regard to the place names in Greenland I endeavour to insert as many place names as possible of European origin but the special Place Names Committee for Greenland does not approve of my views as the members wish the Greenland names employed.

Finally I wish to say that the problem regarding foreign names is not of great interest to my Office as we publish only a few charts of foreign waters. In case of doubt we are inclined to use the English way of spelling such names.

GREAT BRITAIN : Acceptable without material change with following remarks :—

It must be realised that the implementation will be a long term commitment and cannot be completed in a few years.

The proposal that each chart should carry a glossary of foreign generics is not agreed to - a glossary already appears in our Sailing Directions and all that is considered necessary, is to call attention to it in the title of each chart affected.

With reference to the French Hydrographic Office communication which was forwarded with I.H.B. Circular-Letter No. 7-H, dated 24th February 1948, I have to inform you that the system for transliteration, adopted by the Russian Hydrographic Service, and now accepted by the French Hydrographic Office, has been examined, but does not appear to fulfil all the requirements of the conventional English alphabet.

2.—It is hoped that the system given on pages 24-26 of the *Russian Glossary* 1942 produced by the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names (a copy of which is attached) will eventually be universally accepted.

GREECE : No comment.

NETHERLANDS : Draft proposal acceptable without material change with following remarks on draft of proposal :—

1.—At present the Netherlands charts are considered to be the most authoritative source for names on foreign charts as a new spelling of the Dutch language has just been introduced and a reconsideration of the spelling of geographical names is in view.

2.—As some names differ considerably in various languages (e.g. Dunkerque (Fr.) = Dunkirk (Engl.) = Duinkerken (Netherl.); Flushing (Engl.) = Vlissingen (Netherl.) it is suggested that the name used by the country having sovereignty should be entered in brackets after or under the name of the country issuing the chart, if considered necessary.

3.—Uniformity in transcription is considered to be very difficult, if not impossible, as often a phonetic spelling is used in order to get the correct pronunciation e.g. : oe (Netherl.) = u (Engl.); oo (Netherl.) = oa or oe (Engl.) etc.

4.—The glossary mentioned in the note is considered of little use. The mariner is not interested in which word in *Tandjoeng Merah*, *Roode Hoek*, *Red Cape*, *Cabo Rojo*, *Svyatoi Nos* means "Cape". In other cases as *Kara Dag* = Black mountain, which will interest the mariner, the translation will be entered in brackets.

5.—No remarks.

NORWAY : Accepts under condition that it shall only be applied to new editions of charts.

POLAND : No comment.

PORTUGAL : Accepts without important change.

SPAIN : Accepts with no important change.

SWEDEN : Agrees to draft of proposal in point of principle with following remarks on draft of proposal :—

Point 1 : When drawing a quite new chart the names of course are in agreement with the forms prescribed by the most authoritative source. But on older charts still in use there may be many errors as to the names from a modern point of view, and these errors will as a rule not be corrected until new charts are prepared and reproduced.

Point 3 : In the note (see : Report of Proceedings Vth International Hydrographic Conference, page 101) it is stated that "Among countries, where the Roman alphabet is official, international uniformity in transcription system should be advantageous to the several National governments". I wonder if it is possible and desirable to aim at such an international uniformity.

URUGUAY : No comment.

U.S.A. : Acceptable without material change for United States Hydrographic Office and United States Coast and Geodetic Survey with following remarks :—

The report of the Foreign Names Committee of the United States Board on Geographic Names stated that they found the International Hydrographic Bureau's draft proposal to be in substantial agreement with basic principles that have governed the work of the Board on Geographic Names. That part of item 4 of the draft proposal that deals with the preference for separate-word generics, is the only stated principle that is not in complete accord with the Board's position, in that in many instances it would form an exception to the principle of accepting official name forms in Latin-alphabet countries. While the separate-word generic undoubtedly does possess certain advantages

and is favored by the Board where circumstances permit, it is regarded as inappropriate for adoption as a basic working rule, due to the difficulty of application in many foreign-language areas.

The following Member States and non Member States while in agreement with certain of the draft proposals are not in concurrence with the totality of the rules of the proposal :—

ITALY : The comments are given as Appendix "A".

FRANCE : The comments are given as Appendix "B".

FINLAND : Forwarded with their reply which follows, a Table of transcriptions which agrees with the Russian S.H. of 1947 forwarded with Circular-Letter No 7-H of 1948 with the following exceptions :—

X	sha = ts
Ц	tsé = tsh
Ч	tché = h
Ш	shtcha = shtsch

The pronunciation in different languages is very varying, and therefore it would be difficult to bring about an uniform way of proceeding when transcribing russian geographical names and at the same time satisfy the pronunciation in different languages. For this reason a solution seems to be nearly impossible to attain.

MONACO : Has replied that she will abide by the rules of her neighbouring States and will furnish them with all useful information.

SIAM : The Siamese Government has appointed a Board of Committee for adoption of the Geographic Names of Siamese charts and maps into Roman script by the General System of Phonetic Transcription of Siamese Characters into Roman adopted by National Institute of Siam of which I sent one copy to the Bureau in separate cover.

We accept in principle of Uniform Policy for Handling Geographic Names but in our Service we have to follow our system in which there are a few special marks for accent because the Siamese sound and characters are quite different from the European, so the pronunciation of Siamese language from the Roman script is rather difficult. However we try to adopt for the best usage.

GERMANY : In reply to your Circular-Letter No. 6-H dated 18th September 1947 and No. 7-H 1948 of 24th February 1948, no definite answer can be given to the above owing to Germany being divided into the different zones of occupation.

2.—In answering the points in question, the following detailed statements are made.

(a) The point is agreed that as far as German state territory is concerned, we will insert the geographic names on all sea charts and other publications in strict conformity with the names applied by other official offices.

(b) It is doubtful whether it can be agreed without reservation to the proposal made in respect to non-German geographical objects on German sea charts. i.e. :

1° There are numerous local, district and other sorts of names in European as well as in non-European countries which in German colloquial usage are either spelt in a manner deviating considerably from the official spelling or adopted in quite a different form ;

2° Since 1945, in particular, and before all in Central Europe, Occupational Authorities frequently made alterations to geographical names, the justification of which cannot be sanctioned before the peace treaties have been ratified. Nevertheless these names are already being inserted on charts. Besides, by this procedure, such names are admitted as are very strange in comparison to those German names in use not only by Germany, but also by non-German geographers and seamen, for many centuries.

(c) It is agreed however, that transcriptions should be made in Roman characters, although also in this case, there are still many questions to be cleared up, e.g., the Polish, the Swedish, the Russian sign for a soft pronunciation and the Russian sibilates, amongst others. At least, it seems to be necessary to add some signs to the Roman alphabet, representing the more important sounds of such countries.

(d) In principle, it is agreed, but it should be borne in mind that in many cases with regard to the names for "countries, major territorial divisions and boundary features" there must be a distinction between :—

1° District names signifying territories not limited by administrative but only by geographical boundaries, which in many cases are not even to be regarded as fixed boundaries;

2° Administrative territories with fixed boundaries.

For those mentioned under 1° there exist no official names but only names which have been naturalised by colloquial usage, historical practice or similar occurrence; for those mentioned under 2° names have finally been fixed (see i.e., *Statesman's Yearbook*, *Gothaisches Diplomatisches Jahrbuch*, and other sources).

3.—As to the names for parts of the oceans and their limitations, it is agreed without reservations to the proposal submitted by the U.S.A. to the Vth International Conference of Hydrography 1947, which corresponds to a large extent to the proposals made by Germany on previous occasions (see *Grenzen der Ozeane* (Boundaries of Oceans) etc., Annex to *Annalen der Hydrographie*).

In connection with the study of this subject, attention is invited to the following articles in the issue of the *International Hydrographic Review*, Volume XXV, No. 1, May 1948: "Problems of Place Names", "U. S. Board on Geographic Names".

Attention is also invited to the publication of the British Admiralty entitled: *System of Orthography to be adopted for Admiralty Hydrographic Publication* dated April 1946.

Attention is also directed to the detailed publications issued by the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British official use of the Royal Geographical Society, London, a list of which is given on page 121 and 122 of the *International Hydrographic Bulletin*, No. VI, for June 1948.

The Directing Committee request that interested Offices make such additional comment as they may consider advantageous after a study of the enclosed responses from States Members and non Member States. With such comments in hand the Bureau, will submit the draft proposal or a revision thereof to a formal vote to determine adoption or rejection.

APPENDIX A - ITALY

Genova, 20th January 1948

(Translated from the Italian text)

1.—I have examined the general proposal of the International Hydrographic Bureau and the detailed one suggested by the United States Hydrographic Office. I am in full agreement with the opportunity of obtaining uniformity for writing geographical names on nautical charts, but I do not concur in the totality of the rules proposed by the U.S.A. for the reasons developed below :—

2.—Concerning the project presented by the U.S.A. I make the following remarks :—

(a) Par. 3 is only acceptable if at the same time the recommendation included in the said par. 3 is adopted to standardize the system of transliteration. In fact the principal differences and also the major inconveniences are encountered in fact for the geographical names of countries which do not use the roman alphabet.

If each Service transcribes these names according to the transliteration of its own language, the major part of the differences and above all the most important differences will continue to exist;

(b) Par. 2 treats generally of sovereign countries without making difference between national coasts and coasts where the names originate from a language which does not use the roman alphabet. In other words assuming that each Hydrographic Office transcribes the names of colonies and mandates according to the transliteration of its own language and not according to an international system. If these rules were adopted noticeable confusion will occur, for instance :

The Arabian coasts of the Mediterranean have geographical names which are repeated several times. Such names will appear either in English, or in French, or in Italian, or in Spanish, according to the Nation who has sovereignty on this coast, and finally they could be transcribed according to the system of unified transliteration for the coasts of independent Arabian Countries.

Moreover, when the mandate power changes or when the country acquires its independence it has happened to change all the names on the charts.

I think it is more reasonable to establish that the names of countries whose population speaks a language which has not adopted the roman alphabet should be transcribed according to a standard system of transliteration, either when the country is independent or when it is placed under the sovereignty of another State.

3.—I think in conclusion that the formula to be adopted as a guidance should be as follow :—

« Geographical names should be written according to the transliteration system used in the language which has given origin to the names, if such language uses the roman alphabet, and according to a standard transliteration system, if the language who has given origin to the names does not use the roman alphabet. »

In connection with unified transliteration system I retain that, in general, the R.G.S. II system could be adopted.

4.—The following case always remains unsolved when the coasts are inhabited by a population who writes with the roman alphabet, but which is placed under the sovereignty of another State.

APPENDIX B - FRANCE

Paris, 3rd December 1947

(Translated from the French text)

Subject : Standard method of configuration of geographical names.

Annex : Copy of Rules followed by the "Service hydrographique" of the French Navy.

1.—I have the honour to send you herewith a copy of the Rules at present in force at the "Service hydrographique" of the French Navy in connection with the toponymy of charts and books proceeding from the compilation of foreign documents.

2.—These Rules are not altogether in agreement with the draft proposal drawn up by the U.S.A. Delegation at the Vth International Hydrographic Conference. The divergencies from the different articles of the said proposal are as follows :—

3.—*Article 1* deals with original charts constructed by the different countries; this question does not come under the Rules, a copy of which I send you, and I have no objection to offer to the wording of this article.

4.—*Article 2* deals with charts obtained by compilation when the original charts used carry place-names written in Roman characters.

The tendency of the American proposal is to prescribe the adoption of foreign place-names such as they stand, while the French "Service hydrographique" retains on its charts the French forms consecrated by use (Rule 3-Ia). Thus, on a French chart of Great Britain: *Londres*, not *London*, would be inserted.

Further, the French "Service hydrographique" retains the French forms of geographical expressions where these have been given by French navigators, surveyors and geographers and when the expressions have been retained on the original foreign charts with translation or alteration (Rule 3-Ib).

For instance, a French chart of Canada will carry: *Ile aux Renards*, if this expression is an initial French form corresponding to the form *Fox Island* on the original charts.

5.—*Article 3* takes up the question of charts obtained by compilation when the original charts used show place-names in non-Roman lettering.

The American proposal aims at the standardisation of rules concerning the romanisation of lettering for languages not written in Roman characters.

In this connection, the French "Service Hydrographique" follows certain rules (Rule 2) which differ from the rules adopted by the British and American Hydrographic Offices and governing the Russian and Japanese languages.

While the latter two Hydrographic Offices make use of a romanisation which is phonetic for Anglo-Saxons, the French "Service hydrographique" employs a romanisation officially notified by the U.S.S.R. and Japan and which is not phonetic for French-speaking people.

It seems indeed more reasonable to adopt for French publications a romanisation non-phonetic for French-speaking people but accepted by the countries which employ such non-Roman alphabets, rather than a romanisation, phonetic for Anglo-Saxons but non-official;—and non-phonetic for French-speaking peoples.

Concerning Greece, Siam and China, the only other countries making use of non-Roman alphabets and publishing original documents, the French "Service hydrographique", through lack of information on the official method of romanisation obtaining in those countries, follows provisionally the British rules of romanisation,

6.—*Article 4* refers to geographical expressions of detail plotted in Roman lettering on original charts. The American proposal favours the adoption of foreign place-names such as they stand, while the French "Service hydrographique" as a general principle translates the geographical terms and does not translate the denominations accompanying them (Rule 6). The detailed Notice providing for the mode of application of this rule No. 6 is being drawn up; it will be based on the following general principles :

The geographical terms will be translated except in the following cases :—

(a) Geographical terms which have been adopted in the French language having the same signification (e.g. *Rio*);

(b) Geographical terms corresponding to definitely-characteristic local geographical forms, an exact translation of which is difficult (e.g. *Firth*);

(c) Geographical terms which have become customary in maritime usage (e.g. *Sima*);

(d) Geographical terms agglomerated with the denomination to form a single word (e.g. *Grund* in *Baalgrund*).

The denominations will not be translated except in certain cases the enumeration of which is now under consideration.

As a result, in the example given in Article 4 of the American proposal, the French "Service hydrographique" would adopt as it stands the place-name *Falsterborev* (example *d*) but would replace the geographical expression *Falsterbo Rev* by *Récif Falsterbo*.

The American proposal may be upheld for charts if, as it suggests, a glossary of the foreign geographical terms appearing on the chart is annexed to each chart; but with regard to Sailing Directions, such a method often leads to obscure wording (e.g. *Tozo Ho* appearing between *Katu To* and *Sozi Matu*); and it has seemed preferable to translate the geographical terms rather than having constantly to consult a glossary when reading the Sailing Directions.

7.—*Article 5* deals with forms consecrated by usage but limits these to the names of countries, continents, oceans and seas.

The aim of the American proposal is to prescribe the adoption, for fundamental place-names, of the forms consecrated by usage; the considered opinion of the French "Service hydrographique" is in agreement with this. (Rule 2.)

ANNEX - FRANCE

RULES TO BE FOLLOWED FOR THE TOPONOMY OF CHARTS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS DERIVED FROM COMPILATION FROM FOREIGN DOCUMENTS.

**(Règles à suivre pour la toponymie des cartes et ouvrages
provenant de la compilation de documents étrangers).**

(Translation of the French text)

Rule No. 1.

The toponomy used in the construction of the place-name to be inserted in French documents should be *taken from the original national documents* of the country under consideration or, failing these, from original documents relating to such country.

Rule No. 2.

With reference to countries publishing original document not written in Roman characters, the *romanisation of the toponome* (place-name) destined to be used in the construction of the toponome to be inserted in French documents should be carried out in the following way :

U.S.S.R.—Use should be made of the table of transcription of the characters of the Cyrillic alphabet appearing in the *Hydrographic Review*. Monaco, May, 1931, page 194.

GREECE.—Use should be made of the table of transcription of the characters of the Greek alphabet as given in *Instruction Nautique* (Sailing Direction) No. 417 : “Méditerranée orientale”, Volume I, page 524.

JAPAN.—Use should be made of the Japanese booklet : *Table of Japanese Place-Names*, published in 1936.

With reference to place-names (toponomes) not shown in the above Table, the place-names carried on British charts should be transformed as follows :—

Substitute: ti, tya, tyo, tyu for the syllables Chi, Cha Cho, Chu respectively.

Substitute : hu, for, fu.

Substitute : di (or) zi, dya (or) zya, dio (or) zyo, dyu (or) zyu for the syllables ji, ja, jo, ju respectively.

jya, jyo, jyu, to be replaced by : dya, dyo, dyu, respectively.

Substitute : si, sya, syo, syu for the syllables shi, sha, sho, shu, respectively.

Tsu, to be written tu.

wu, to be written u.

ye, to be replaced by e.

SIAM.—The place-name carried by British charts should be adopted.

CHINA.—The place-name written in Roman characters which accompanies the place-name written in Chinese characters on Chinese charts, should be adopted. Should this be lacking, the place-name as appearing on British charts should be adopted.

Rule No. 3.

1.—(a) : When a *French* form, sanctioned by custom, of a proper name of place or of geographical expression exists, such form should be adopted. The list of these forms is limited to forms appearing in the Geographical Section of the *International Code of Signals* (French Edition), pages 360 and seq. — and to those found in the 2-volume Larousse dictionary.

Example : Pays-Bas, Sardaigne, cap de Bonne-Espérance, cap Spartel, détroit de La Pérouse.

(b) The French forms of geographical expressions as given by French navigators, hydrographers or geographers should also be adopted where such expressions have been retained locally even translated or deformed.

Example : Ile aux Renards. Where this expression is an initial French form corresponding to the form Fox Island, on the original charts.

Pointe de Jonquières (corresponding to the form Mys Zhonkier on the original charts).

(c) In Sailing Directions, the French form thus adopted should be followed, between brackets, by the integral foreign form at the point in the text where the place under consideration is described.

Example : Pays-Bas (Nederland);

Sardaigne (Sardegna);

Cap de Bonne-Espérance (Cape of Good Hope);

Cap Spartel (Cabo Espartel);

Détroit de La Pérouse (Sôya Kaikyô).

Exceptionally, the integral foreign form may on occasion be recalled, between brackets, either in the title of the chart or on the chart itself, close by the place being dealt with.

2.—Should a French expression have been replaced on the original charts by an entirely different expression which is neither a translation or a deformation of the initial French form, then it is the new expression that should be adopted.

Example : Ile Wellington, and not “Ile aux Renards”, where the latter expression, although the initial French form, has been replaced by Wellington Island on the original charts.

An historical reminder of the old French form might be inserted in the Sailing Directions.

The old French form, placed between brackets, might occasionally be recalled either in the title of the chart or on the chart itself, close by the place under consideration.

Rule No. 4.

Where a foreign *geographical expression* has become a proper place-name from the fact of its *familiarity*, the integral foreign form of such expression should be adopted.

The list of such forms is limited to forms shown in the Geographical Section of the *International Code of Signals* (French Edition) pages 360 *and seq.*, to those given in the 2-volume Larousse dictionary, and to all town-names which include a foreign geographical term of which no French form sanctioned by custom exists. It is understood that the orthography of these forms as given in the International Code should not be adopted as it stands but might be modified in order to take into account the clauses of above Rule No. 2.

In this case each different word of the foreign geographical expression should commence by a capital letter and be united by a hyphen.

Example : West-Point ;
 Long-Island ;
 Rio-Grande-Do-Sul (province) ;
 Porto-Longone.

Rule No. 5.

Specifically proper foreign names not coming within the provisions of Rule No. 3, i.e., for which no French form sanctioned by custom exists, should be reproduced integrally.

Example : Belen. - Salud.

Rule No. 6.

With regard to *geographical expressions* not coming within the provisions of Rules 3 and 4, i.e. geographical expressions for which no French form sanctioned by custom exists, also with regard to geographical expressions the integral foreign form of which has not become a proper name of place, the following rule should be adopted :—

« In principle, the geographical formatives (simple or multiple) of an expression and their qualifying terms should be translated; on the contrary, the denominations should not be so translated. »

The methods of application of the above rule will form the subject of special Direction.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your obedient Servant,

The President of the Directing Committee,
 Vice-Admiral J. D. NARES.

