

Geographic Names Standardization Policy for Belarus

United States Board on Geographic Names

Foreign Names Committee



March 2020

1. Introduction

This geographic names standardization policy has been prepared as an aid to those geographic names experts who are the working staff for the United States Board on Geographic Names (BGN) in the standardization of the geographic names of Belarus for United States Government use. The BGN and its staff work to effect consistent treatment of geographic name spellings in U.S. Government databases, publications, maps, and charts. The country policies are intended to satisfy, in part, the statutory requirements levied upon the BGN in Public Law USC 80-242 to develop principles, policies and procedures for geographic names standardization, and to promulgate decisions with respect to the principles of geographic nomenclature and orthography.

2. Languages and Language Policy

a. Demographics

Belarus is a landlocked country in central Eastern Europe. It borders Lithuania and Latvia to the north, Ukraine to the south, Russia to the east, and Poland to the west. Belarus, one of the former Soviet Republics, gained its independence on August 25, 1991.

Belarus has a population of 9,503,800 (July 2018 est.) according to data provided by the World Factbook.¹ According to the Official Website of Belarus, the ethnic composition of the population is 83.7% Belarusian, 8.3% Russian, 3.1% Polish, 1.7% Ukrainian, and 0.1% Jewish.²

b. Languages

According to article 17 of the Constitution of Belarus, the official languages of the country are Belarusian (ISO 639-3 code bel) and Russian (ISO 639-3 code rus).³ Furthermore, a mix of Belarusian and Russian (known as “Trasyanka”) is also frequently used, sometimes even by government officials in their speeches.⁴

Until 1991, Russian was the official language of the Belorussian Soviet Socialist Republic and the majority of street and road signs, as well as maps, reflected only Russian toponymic forms. Since gaining its independence in 1991, Belarus has continued to use Russian as its lingua franca, with the ever increasing application of Belarusian name forms in street and road signs.⁵

According to the World Factbook, 70.2% of Belarusian citizens speak Russian as their primary language, 23.4% speak Belarusian, 3.1% speak Polish, and 1.7% speak Ukrainian.

¹ World Factbook. Belarus. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bo.html>

² About Belarus. Key Facts about Belarus. <https://www.belarus.by/en/about-belarus/key-facts>.

³ Belorussian Constitution, Article 17. <http://pravo.by/pravovaya-informatsiya/normativnye-dokumenty/konstitutsiya-respubliki-belarus/>

⁴ Belarus Toponymic Factfile. Maddock, Becki. 30th BGN/PCGN Conference, London, 21st-25th September 2015. Agenda item 6.1.

⁵ Belarus Toponymic Factfile. Maddock, Becki. 30th BGN/PCGN Conference, London, 21st-25th September 2015. Agenda item 6.1.

The BGN has approved a dual-language policy for Belarus. Belarusian and Russian names, when available, are approved for all features in Belarus. If names are available in both Belarusian and Russian, Belarusian names are to precede Russian names in dual-name entries that appear in gazetteer format with properly assigned language codes. When names for a single feature are available in both languages, the Belarusian name takes Name Rank 1 and the Russian name becomes Name Rank 2.

c. Geographic Names Standardization

Belgeodesiya is the State Cartographic and Geodesic Fund of the Republic of Belarus and is the authority that oversees all activities in regards to geodesy and cartography, including maps, atlases, and other toponymy-related sources published in both Belarusian and Russian.⁶ This is based on the law No. 396-3 passed on 14 July 2008 and revised on 16 November 2010 by the Resolution of the Council of Ministers of the Republic of Belarus.⁷

Maps and tourist information published in Belarusian are still difficult to find, especially at larger scales.

Belgeodesiya also participates in the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN). It is active in the Eastern Europe, Northern, and Central Asia Division.

3. Toponymic Policies

a. Script and Orthography

Belarusian:

Belarusian is an eastern Slavic language stemming from the Indo-European branch.⁸ The alphabet consists of thirty-two characters, which are written in Cyrillic. It is made up of nineteen consonants, thirteen vowels, and the character (') that does not have an individual sound, but instead alters the sound of the letter that comes before it. Belarusian has a Latin and Arabic alphabet as well, but it is mainly historic and not used in the present day.⁹

Russian:

The Russian Cyrillic alphabet consists of thirty-three characters, made up of twenty-one consonants, ten vowels, and the two letters (b, ъ) that do not have an individual sound but change pronunciation of the previous letter.

⁶ Goskartgeofond. <https://geo.by/goskartgeotsentr>

⁷ Goskartgeofond. <https://geo.by/goskartgeotsentr>

⁸ Lonely Planet. Book.

⁹ Have Belarusians Always Used the Cyrillic Alphabet? Belarus Digest. January 12 2012. <https://belarusdigest.com/story/myths/have-belarusians-always-used-the-cyrillic-alphabet/>

b. Romanization

The Belarusian Cyrillic alphabet uses the 1979 BCGN/PCGN Romanization system for Belarusian and the Russian Cyrillic alphabet uses the 1947 BGN/PCGN Romanization system for Russian.

For a complete and up-to-date romanization system tables for Belarusian and Russian, to include additional notes and Unicode values, please visit the following website: <http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/romanization.html>

c. Diacritics

The following diacritical marks are encountered in Romanized standardized name forms in Belarusian and Russian:

Diacritics Permitted in Standardized Belarusian Geographic Names:

Character Name	Character	Romanization
Capital E with dieresis	Ё	Yo
Small e with dieresis	ё	yo
Capital Y with breve	Ѣ	W
Small y with breve	ѣ	w
Soft sign, affects pronunciation of preceding letter	ь	' (right single quotation mark)
Hard sign, affects pronunciation of preceding letter	,	" (right double quotation mark)

Diacritics Permitted in Standardized Russian Geographic Names:

Character Name	Character	Romanization
Capital E with dieresis	Ё	Ё, Yë

Diacritics Permitted in Standardized Russian Geographic Names:

Small e with dieresis	ë	ë, yë
Soft sign, affects pronunciation of preceding letter	ь	' (right single quotation mark)
Hard sign, affects pronunciation of preceding letter	Ъ	" (right double quotation mark)

Uppercase letters in standardized name forms retain diacritics.

The dieresis is frequently not shown on the character **e** in official Russian or Belarusian cartography except for non-Russian or non-Belarusian names, or on names that are not commonly known. However, the dieresis is added to the Romanized name form, always indicating a stressed vowel, and is applied to mapping products when its usage can be determined from dictionaries, encyclopedias, identical geographic names in the Belarus or Russia names file, or other sources.

d. Generic Terms

A generic is a term that describes a feature. Examples include words such as ‘river,’ ‘hill,’ and ‘lake.’ Except in cases in which the generic type does not identify the feature type, generics appearing in standardized name forms should be considered true generics. Otherwise, the term is considered to be a false generic and should not be collected in the generic field.

When collecting Belarusian or Russian names for a feature that has a generic, the “Generic” field in that record will be populated with the corresponding form in both the native script and the Romanized script.

For example, a feature that is a ‘вадасховішча’ or *reservoir* will be collected as ‘вадасховішча’ in native script and ‘vadaskhovishcha’ as per the Romanization guide. **Appendix A** provides a list common Belarusian generics, and **Appendix B** a list of common Russian generics.

e. Declension

Both Belarusian and Russian languages use grammatical declension, most evident in cartography when place names include an adjective as part of the proper name. Declension is based on singular, plural, case, and gender (masculine, feminine, neuter) designations.

Please see the next section (**f. Hyphenation and Capitalization**) for common examples of declension.

f. Hyphenation and Capitalization

Hyphens that occur in main-entry names appearing on official Belarusian and Russian sources should generally be accepted as part of the BGN-standard form (name type N).

Occasionally, adjectives modifying the proper noun are abbreviated as a space saving measure, and also include a hyphen. This is particularly prevalent when there are two features, usually collocated, that share part of the proper noun, but have different modifiers, for example *Upper- and Lower-*, *Greater-* and *Lesser-*, etc.

In these instances, hyphens should not be treated as part of the standard name. The abbreviated modifier should be expanded according to the proper declension (see table below) and the compound name should be recorded without a hyphen. For example *Вял. – Кракотка (Vyal. – Krakotka)* should be recorded as *Вялікая Кракотка (Vyalikaya Krakotka)*

Belarusian: Common abbreviations found on Belarusian maps are as follows:

Abbreviation on map <i>Romanization</i>	Masculine Case	Feminine Case	Neuter Case	Plural Case	English Translation
Верх. <i>Vyerkh.</i>	Верхні <i>Vyerkhni</i>	Верхняя <i>Vyerkhnyaya</i>	Верхняе <i>Vyerkhnyaye</i>	Верхнія <i>Vyerkhniya</i>	Upper
Ниж. <i>Nizh.</i>	Ніжні <i>Nizhni</i>	Ніжняя <i>Nizhnyaya</i>	Ніжняе <i>Nizhnyaye</i>	Ніжнія <i>Nizhniya</i>	Lower
Нов. <i>Nov.</i>	Новы <i>Novy</i>	Новая <i>Novaya</i>	Новае <i>Novaye</i>	Новыя <i>Novyya</i>	New
Стар. <i>Star.</i>	Стары <i>Stary</i>	Старая <i>Staraya</i>	Старое <i>Staroye</i>	Старыя <i>Staryya</i>	Old
Сред. <i>Sred.</i>	Сярэдні <i>Syaredni</i>	Сярэдняя <i>Syarednyaya</i>	Сярэдняе <i>Syarednyaye</i>	Сярэднія <i>Syaredniya</i>	Middle
Вял. <i>Vyal.</i>	Вялікі <i>Vyaliki</i>	Вялікая <i>Vyalikaya</i>	Вялікае <i>Vyalikaye</i>	Вялікія <i>Vyalikiya</i>	Great(er)
Мал. <i>Mal.</i>	Малы <i>Maly</i>	Малая <i>Malaya</i>	Малое <i>Maloye</i>	Малыя <i>Malyya</i>	Small(er)/Lesser
Прав. <i>Prav.</i>	Правы <i>Pravy</i>	Правая <i>Pravaya</i>	Правае <i>Pravaye</i>	Правыя <i>Pravyya</i>	Right
Лев. <i>Lyev.</i>	Левы <i>Lyevy</i>	Левая <i>Lyevaya</i>	Левае <i>Lyevaye</i>	Левыя <i>Lyevyya</i>	Left

Russian: The same principles apply to adjectives abbreviated in Russian, however the adjectives are romanized in accordance with the Russian system. Common examples are below:

Abbreviation on map <i>Romanization</i>	Masculine Case	Feminine Case	Neuter Case	Plural Case	English Translation
Верх. <i>Verkh.</i>	Верхний <i>Verkhniy</i>	Верхняя <i>Verkhnyaya</i>	Верхнее <i>Verkhneye</i>	Верхние <i>Vyerkhniye</i>	Upper
Ниж. <i>Nizh.</i>	Нижний <i>Nizhniy</i>	Нижняя <i>Nizhnyaya</i>	Нижнее <i>Nizhneye</i>	Нижние <i>Nizhniye</i>	Lower
Нов. <i>Nov.</i>	Новый <i>Novyy</i>	Новая <i>Novaya</i>	Новое <i>Novoye</i>	Новые <i>Novyye</i>	New
Стар. <i>Star.</i>	Старый <i>Staryy</i>	Старая <i>Staraya</i>	Старое <i>Staroye</i>	Старые <i>Staryye</i>	Old
Сред. <i>Sred.</i>	Средний <i>Sredniy</i>	Средняя <i>Srednaya</i>	Среднее <i>Sredneye</i>	Средние <i>Sredniye</i>	Middle
Вял. <i>Vyal.</i>	Великий <i>Velikiy</i>	Великая <i>Velikaya</i>	Великое <i>Velikoye</i>	Великие <i>Velikiye</i>	Great(er)
Мал. <i>Mal.</i>	Малый <i>Malyy</i>	Малая <i>Malaya</i>	Малое <i>Maloye</i>	Малые <i>Malyye</i>	Small(er)/Lesser
Прав. <i>Prav.</i>	Правый <i>Pravyy</i>	Правая <i>Pravaya</i>	Правое <i>Pravoye</i>	Правые <i>Pravyye</i>	Right
Лев. <i>Lev.</i>	Левый <i>Levyy</i>	Левая <i>Levaya</i>	Левое <i>Levoye</i>	Левые <i>Levyye</i>	Left

In accordance with BGN policy, all generic terms occurring as a separate name element should be capitalized, even if such terms are not in the capitalized format on official sources.

g. Long and Short Forms

For names of administrative divisions, short forms are occasionally found on official sources. These and all short forms are collected and treated as Name Rank 1 form. Long forms are collected as Name Rank 2.

Short and long forms of names of populated places are approved when supported by official evidence.

For railroad (RSTN, RSTP) and landing (LDNG) features, the generic terms are collected along with the proper name of the respective features, even though the generic term may not appear on the official map sheet. The long name becomes Name Rank 2 and the short-form name (proper

name without generic) becomes Name Rank 1. For example: *Bulanash* [short form] Name Rank 1; *Stantsyya Bulanash* [long form] Name Rank 2.

h. Numbers

Cardinal and ordinal numerals that occur as integral parts in geographic names should be recorded in their expanded form. The Name on Source should be recorded as it appears on the source. Roman numerals are retained throughout. For example:

Feature name on source Feature name recorded in the GNDB

Ковыльная-II	Kovyl'naya-II
Бригада № II	Brigada Nomer II
Бригада 2-я	Brigada Vtoraya
Бірлік I	Birlik I

Railroad stops (RSTP) and sidings (RSD) in Belarus frequently appear on maps as a generic term and distance in kilometers, for example раз. 10 км. These labels are map information and are not collected as geographic names.

i. Abbreviations

Abbreviations found in the proper name or – more frequently—the generic term must be collected in their expanded form. For compound names, abbreviations must be collected in the proper case. Please see discussion in **4.f Hyphenation and Capitalization** above. A list of common abbreviations is also included in **Appendix B**.

Many authoritative sources available for Belarus, especially at the 1:50,000 scale, were produced by the Soviet General Staff in the period between the late 1970s and late 1980s. While these maps are high quality and very detailed, a considerable amount of features may have changed names. The user should also be aware of abbreviations common during the Soviet era, some of which have been retained to date. An example of this would be the abbreviation of the generic term “pionerlag,” which should be expanded to *pionerlager*. “Pionerlager” in itself is a contraction that stands for “Pionerskiy Lager” - a youth summer camp. Although the organization ceased to exist after the dissolution of the USSR, the term “Pionerlager” still can be found on numerous maps produced after 1991.

4. Political Geography Policy

a. Country Name

Name Type	Name
Conventional Short Form	Belarus
Conventional Long Form	Republic of Belarus
Belarusian Short Form – Non-Roman Script	Беларусь
Belarusian Short Form – Romanized	Byelarus’
Belarusian Long Form – Non-Roman Script	Рэспубліка Беларусь
Belarusian Long Form – Romanized	Respublika Byelarus’
Russian Short Form – Non-Roman Script	Беларусь
Russian Short Form – Romanized	Belarus’
Russian Long Form – Non-Roman Script	Республика Беларусь
Russian Long Form – Romanized	Respublika Belarus’

b. Capital Name

Name Type	Name
Conventional	Minsk
Belarusian Non-Roman Script	Мінск
Belarusian– Romanized	Minsk
Russian– Non-Roman Script	Минск

Russian– Romanized	Minsk
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c. First-Order Administrative Divisions

At writing, Belarus contained seven ADM1s, including six voblastsi (provinces) and Minsk Horad (city).

Romanized ADM1 Name	GEC	GENC	Seat
Brestskaya Voblasts' (B) / Brestskaya Oblast' (R)	BO01	BYBR	Brest
Homyel'skaya Voblasts' (B) / Gomel'skaya Oblast' (R)	BO02	BYHO	Homyel'
Hrodzyenskaya Voblasts' (B) / Grodnenskaya Oblast' (R)	BO03	BYHR	Hrodna
Mahilyowskaya Voblasts' (B) / Mogilëvskaya Oblast' (R)	BO06	BYMA	Mahilyow
Minsk / Horad Minsk (B) / Minsk / Gorod Minsk (R)	BO04	BYHM	Minsk
Minskaya Voblasts' (B) / Minskaya Oblast' (R)	BO05	BYMI	Minsk
Vitsyebskaya Voblasts' (B) / Vitebskaya Oblast' (R)	BO07	BYVI	Vitsyebsk

d. Conventional and Anglicized Names

Conventional names and Anglicized Names are approved for the following geographic features in Belarus:

Conventional Name

Name	UFI	UNI	Designation Code
Dnieper	-2902197	9252193	STM

Anglicized Variant

Minsk City	-1946325	14833284	ADM1
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e. Disputed Territories

For the latest information on country-specific boundary disputes, consult the U.S. Department of State's Office of the Geographer and Global Issues. internationalboundaries@state.gov

Belarus currently has no border or territorial disputes.

5. Source Material

The following is a listing of topographic and hydrographic source material. Each category is prioritized according to recommended usage for geographic names selection.

a. Topographic Sources

The following may be useful sources for Belorussian maps:

1. Respublika Byelarus', Administratsyyna-Terytaryyal'naye Dzyalyennye, 1:500,000, administrative-territorial map of the Republic of Belarus, Byelkartahrafiya, Minsk, 2003 (in Belarusian)
2. General'nyy Shtab, Soviet military topographic maps, scale 1:200,000, various dates 1970's to early 1990's (in Russian)
3. Obshchegeograficheskiy Atlas, civilian topographic map series, 1:200,000, Belkartografiya, publication began in 2001. (in Russian)
4. Respublika Byelarus', Atlas Avtomobil'nykh Dorog, Minskaya Oblast', 1:200,000, Belkartografiya, 2004. (in Russian)
5. Byelarus', Atlas Avtomobil'nykh Dorog, Minsk i Minskaya Oblast', 1:200,000, 1:35,000, "TRIVIUM," 2001. (in Russian)

b. Hydrographic Sources

1. Hydrographic Charts, Glavnoye Upravleniye Navigatsii i Okeanografii, Ministerstva Oborony Rossiyskoy Federatsii, St. Petersburg, 1991-1995.

c. Railroad Sources

1. Atlas Zheleznikh I Avtomobil'nykh Dorog Rossii, Stran SNG I Baltii, (AVTO KEMP), 319 pages, Moscow, 2005.
2. Atlas Zheleznikh I Avtomobil'nykh Dorog Rossii, Stran SNG I Baltii, (AVTO KEMP), 271 pages, Moscow, 2003.
3. Atlas, Zheleznyye Dorogi, Federal'naya Sluzhba Geodezii i Kartografii Rossii (Roskartografiya), 255 pages, Moscow, 2002.

Appendix A. Glossary of Belarusian Generic Terms

Transliterated Belarusian Generic	Belarusian Generic	Feature Designation
Azyory	Азёры	lakes (LKS)
Balota	Балота	swamp (SWMP)
Syel'savyet	Сельсавет	village council (ADM3)
Gara	Гара	mountain (MT/HLL)
Lyes	Лес	forest (FRST)
Прыпуначны Punkt	Прыпыначны Пункт	rail stop (RSTP)
Rayon	Раён	district (ADM2)
Stantsyya	Станцыя	rail station (RSTN)
Urochyshcha	Урочышча	area (AREA)
Voblast'	Вобласть	province (ADM1)
Vozyera	Возера	lake (LK)

Appendix B. Glossary of Russian Generic Terms

Transliterated Russian Generic	Russian Generic	Abbreviation	Feature Designation
Balka	балка	бал., б.	ravine (gently sloping sides) (RVN)
Boloto	болото	бол.	marsh (MRSH)
Dom Otdykha	дом отдыха	Д. О.	vacation facility (RSRT)
Elektricheskaya Podstantsiya	Электрическая Подстанция	ст.	electric power substation (PS)
Ferma	ферма	фер.	farm (FRM)
Gora	гора	г.	mountain (MT); hill (MT)
Gorod	город	г.	city, first-order administrative division (ADM1)
Kanal	канал	кан.	canal (CNL)
Kolkhoz	колхоз	клх.	collective farm (FRM)
Kolodets	колодец	к.	well (WLL)
Lager ¹	лагерь	лаг.	camp, military camp (CMP)
Les	лес		forest (FRST)
Log	лог		ravine (RVN)
Molochno-Tovarnaya Ferma	Молочно-Товарная Ферма	МТФ	dairy farm (FRM)
Oblast ¹	область	обл.	region, district, province (ADM1)
Ostanovochnyy Punkt	остановочный пункт	ост. п.	railroad stop (RSTP)
Ostrov	остров	о.	island (ISL)
Ovtsetovarnaya Ferma	Овцетоварная Ферма	ОТФ	sheep farm (FRM)
Ozëra	озёра		lakes (LKS), salt lakes (LKN)
Pionerlager ¹	пионерлагерь	пионерлаг.	youth summer camp (CMP)
Pristan ¹	пристань	прист.	landing (LDNG)
Prud	пруд		reservoir, artificial pond (RSV); pond (PND)
Rayon	район	р-н	district (ADM2)

Transliterated Russian Generic	Russian Generic	Abbreviation	Feature Designation
Razvaliny	развалины	разв.	ruins (RUIN)
Raz"yezd	разъезд	раз.	passing siding (RSD)
Reka	река	р.	river (STM)
Rodnik	родник	род.	spring (SPNG)
Sel'sovet	Сельсовет		village council (ADM3)
Sovkhoz	совхоз	свх.	state farm (FRM)
Stantsiya	станция		railroad station (RSTN)
Urochishche	урочище	ур.	area (AREA); tract, locality (LCTY)
Ushchel'ye	ущелье	ущ.	gorge (GRGE); ravine (RVN); canyon (CNYN)
Vodokhranilishche	водохранилище	вдхр.	reservoir (RSV)
Zapovednik	заповедник		reserve (RESF)