Pavel Štěpán

Namegiving in the Czech Republic: Legal Regulation and the Role of Onomasticians

The relationships between names and legislation represent one of the crucial topics of contemporary onomastics. One of the last volumes of the journal *Onoma* (2012) was dedicated to the theme *Names and Law;* it provides a comparative overview of the situation in different European countries which have or used to have name legislation, namely Austria, Dennmark, France, Finland, Hungary, Iceland, Norway, Poland, Russia, and Sweden. The aim of this paper is to focus on the issue of the name policy in Czech Republic. The process of namegiving is investigated from the point of view of its legal regulation and the role of experts, namely onomasticians, in this process. Two basic categories of proper names are examined: anthroponyms (particularly given names) and toponyms (with a focus on oikonyms and street names).

1. Anthroponyms

The legislation on personal names has a long tradition in Europe. Modern civil laws were preceded by ecclesiastical regulations. For example, according to the Roman Catechism, approved at the Trent Council in 1560's, children were to be given names of the Catholic saints or beatified. Ecclesiastical rules significantly influenced the regulation of personal names in the territory of the present-day Czech Republic up to the half of the 20th century (cf. KNAPPOVÁ 2017: 41). The first civil name law in Czechoslovakia was approved in 1950. At present, the crucial legal norm that influences the choice and use of personal names in Czech Republic is the Law of Registers, Name and Surname from 2000; its last amendment is from 2014 (cf. HENYCH 2015).

What does this law say about the forms of given names[1] that are to be registered by local state authorities? The main condition is that distorted, diminutive or pet forms of names may not be registered in official documents. Until 2014, the law did not explicitly say that the existence of the name is necessary. However, according to the interpretation of this law used by the state authorities, the existence of a name was a necessary condition for its registration. This condition was included as late as in the amendment of the law from 2014. Moreover, a person can use a maximum of two given names, the name must be in accordance with the gender of the person, a person cannot have two identical

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[1] Not only given names, but also surnames are regulated by the law. The topic of this paper is, however, restricted to given names.

names, as well as siblings cannot have identical names. An important condition, though rather vague from the linguistic point of view, is that name must be registered in its correct orthographic form. This formulation departs form an inaccurate understanding of orthography, which is often understood more broadly, often in relation to other linguistic levels, such as phonology, grammar or word-formation.

If any doubts occur, according to the law, the registry office should require an expert opinion concerning the particular name form. This expert opinion should be issued by one of the official experts in the field of verification of names and surnames for their registration in official personal documents.

Local authorities represented by the register offices officially use the handbook by MILOSLAVA KNAPPOVÁ (last edition 2017). This name dictionary is regularly updated and its last 6th edition includes 17,000 name forms. It comprises also etymological data, hypocoristic forms and other complementary information (KNAPPOVÁ 2017). The author of this book is also one of the official experts in this field; name expert opinions are issued also by the Department of Onomastics of the Czech Language Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences.

If an expert is asked for an official opinion, it must be considered that from a linguistic point of view only basic, official, standard forms of reliably recorded existing names can be positively evaluated. When evaluating a name form, a research in name dictionaries from various languages must be done. All accessible (and, of course, reliable) name dictionaries and indexes are used.

The most important problems experts must face when evaluating the individual name forms should be given some attention. One of the crucial questions is "what is the basic form of a name?" According to the mentioned law, a diminutive or pet form (hypocoristic form) of a name cannot be registered. This means that only a basic, official name form can be positively evaluated. However, the boundary between a basic, official form and an unofficial, hypocoristic form is not always sharp and sometimes it is permeable. A hypocoristic form may gain independence of the original name and a new official name form without a sign of unofficiality comes into existence. This principle is one of the sources of enriching the repertory of given names. For example, the male name *Radek* was recognised only as a pet form of compound names like *Radoslav* or *Radomír* till 1950s. Nowadays, it is regarded as a completely autonomous name.

It is immensely difficult to keep a unified system regarding the boundary between official and pet forms. For example, applicants for expert opinions can hardly understand that it is not possible to register the form *Věrka,* which is a diminutive pet form of the female name *Věra,* whereas there is no problem to register the form *Alenka,* generally regarded as a diminutive pet form of the name *Alena* in Czech. These problems sometimes result from the interference of

foreign languages. For example, names like *Janek* (a pet form of *Jan*) or *Alenka* are regularly used as official, independent forms in South-Slavic languages (Kovatschev 1995: 577, Keber 1988: 99).

Sometimes a mere coincidence may play an important role in evaluating a name-form. The form *Jarka* is widely used as a both male and female unofficial hypocoristic form of compound names like *Jaroslav(a)* or *Jaromír(a).* Such pet forms cannot be officially registered in Czech Republic. However, the opinion concerning the female name *Jarka* issued by the Czech Language Institute was finally positive despite these facts. This surprising conclusion was based on the existence of a Frisian female name of the same form, but completely different origin: the Frisian name *Jarka* is interpreted as a female form of the male name *Jark,* which is a variant of the name *Jarig,* which came into existence as a short form of compound names with the first Germanic element *ger-* 'spear' (Seibicke 1998: 527).

Another question experts must often solve is how should the formulation "existing name" be interpreted. It must be considered that an isolated occurrence of a name in a state with different laws or its presence on the Internet may not be relevant. Experts from the field of linguistics must evaluate the individual names from the linguistic point of view. Therefore, the name should be included in some reliable name dictionaries; its appereance in a dictionary should be understood as a proof of its "linguistic acceptability". Names that only sporadically occur abroad must be evaluated negatively. This was the case of the female name *Metallica,* which was finally accepted by Swedish authorities, or literary female name *Renesme(e),* sporadically found in the USA (this is a name of a literary and film character from the Twilight Saga, half-girl and half-vampire). These names cannot be, so far, regarded as official name-forms. On the other hand, the female name *Skrollan* (from Swedish *Skrålan,* a literary name invented by Astrid Lindgren, author of books for children) could be positively evaluated because it is reliably recorded as a name commonly used in Germany in name dictionaries (Kohlheim 2016: 381), though it was also originally used as a literary name.

The practise of evaluation of given names in the Czech Republic can be illustrated by the individual types of name forms that cannot be recommended from the linguistic point of view, adducing authentic examples from the expert opinions issued by the Czech Language Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences:

a) Invented forms, such as *Wift,* without any obvious sense in any language are rejected. Such forms are sometimes created on the basis of numerology.

b) Invented blends of two existing names, such as *Kamlou* (a name intended for a boy, formed from the beginnings of the names of his parents *Kamila* and

Louis) or *Foxmilián (Fox* and *Maxmilián)* are also unsuitable according to the name law.

c) Common nouns such as *Pampeliška* 'dandelion' or adjectives (e.g. *Killed* or *Blue*) not attested as given names in relevant sources are also excluded.

d) Toponyms, such as *Havana* (capital of Cuba) or *Almeida* (a city in Portugal), cannot be, according to the Czech name law, registered as given names, if they are not reliably attested as personal names.

e) A name must be registered in its official form; pet forms are excluded. Especially hypocoristic forms used for both genders, like *Míla* from both *Miloslav* (male) and *Miloslava* (female), are regarded as unsuitable. Neither diminutive pet forms like *Julek* form *Julius, Růženka* form *Růžena* or *Apolenka* from *Apolena* can be used.

f) Forms with incorrect spelling are excluded: *Timy* (recommended alternatives include *Tim* or *Timmy*), *Trinyti* (instead of *Trinity*), *Nicollas* (instead of *Nicolas*), *Maxmillián* (instead of *Maxmilián*), *Jůlie* (instead of *Julie*), *Márfy* (this form was intended as a Czech adaptation reflecting the supposed pronunciation of the name *Murphy*). These changes of the official spelling are often influenced by numerology as well.

g) Other changes of existing names must be also evaluated negatively, e.g. the female name form *Vilmína* created by contamination of the existing names *Vilma* and *Vilemína.*

h) A male name cannot be used as a female name, and vice versa (for example the form *Walter* cannot be recommended as a female name).

As regards the consequences of the issued expert opinions, local state authorities usually, in accordance with the law, require the submission of expert opinions in problematic cases and they respect their conclusions. In several cases, courts have decided about a certain name form. Courts do not always respect the linguistic arguments, finding them less important than for example "children's rights". This was the case of the name *Apoléna,* which is not, from the linguistic point of view, a correct and justified name form; the recommended form was *Apolena* without the length of the third syllable. However, the court decided that the child has a right to use the form *Apoléna.*

2. Toponyms

The situation in the field of toponyms is completely different in the Czech Republic.[2] The names of towns, villages, their parts and streets, representing

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[2] The most important problems of the standardisation of toponyms in the Czech Republic are summarised by Boháč (2009).

those categories of geographical names that are most important for the official communication, including the delimitation of addresses, are "regulated" by the municipal law from 2000 (*Zákon o obcích,* online). This regulation is rather symbolic, if compared to the strict regulation in the field of personal given names. According to the mentioned law, a name of a municipality (town, village), its parts, streets and other public areas must be given in the Czech language.[3] The law also determines that streets or other public areas „should not have identical names and names in honour of living persons". Another point of the law is that a municipality can suggest a change of the name of the municipality; these changes are approved by the Ministry of the Interior. Names of municipality parts or streets and other public areas are in competence of the municipality; the Ministry of Interior is only informed about them.

The policy in the area of oikonyms in the Czech Republic will be illustrated by several recent cases of place-name changes:

a) The village of *Dolany* near Prague was renamed to *Dolany nad Vltavou* in 2016 (*Informace o územní identifikaci,* online). The reason for this change was the ambiguity of the name *Dolany,* which belongs to 12 different villages in the Czech Republic, the nearest of which is located only 18 km from the current *Dolany nad Vltavou.* The original name *Dolany* was complemented by a localising attribute meaning 'upon the Vltava river'. The approval of the Ministry of Interior was only formal in this case.

b) The name of a part of the municipality of Třebotov near Prague called *Solopysky* was changed to *Solopisky* in 2004, due to the decision of the local representatives (*Změny v datovém obsahu ÚIR-ZSJ,* online). In accordance with the law, the Ministry of Interior just took this change into account. The change affects only the spelling, not the pronunciation of the name. It is rather interesting that the original spelling with *-y-* is kept in the name of three different villages in Bohemia called *Solopysky.* The etymology of the name is uncertain: it is usually interpreted as departing from a derisive nickname of the inhabitants and is connected with the nouns *sůl* 'salt' and *pysk* 'lip' (PROFOUS–SVOBODA 1957: 134–135). The inhabitants of the village infer that the name should be associated rather with the noun *písek* 'sand' (however, this interpretation is impossible for linguistic reasons); this was probably the impulse for the change. From the linguistic point of view, this change is nonsensical, but onomasticians were not asked for their opinion.

c) A part of the municipality of Hazlov in the westernmost part of Bohemia called *Táborská* was renamed to *Vlastislav* in 2016 (*Informace o územní identifikaci,* online). However, the name *Táborská* was valid only from 1961; by this time,

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[3] Special rules are valid for localities with certain ethnic minorities.

this settlement, situated in the Sudeten region with a dominance of German inhabitants until 1945, was officially called *Seichenreuth* (*Retrospektivní lexikon obcí československé socialistické republiky 1850–1970,* 1978: 471–472, 533). The significant change of inhabitants after the World War 2, when an absolute majority of German inhabitants were expelled from the country, caused changes of toponyms. Most of these changes, which consisted usually in translation of names from German to Czech, phonological and/or morphological adaptations of names or creation of completely new toponyms, independent of the original German names, took place in the first years after the war. What is important, all the changes of the original German place names had to be approved by the toponymical committee in the period after 1945 and subsequently registered by the Ministry of the Interior (cf. MATÚŠOVÁ 2015: 151–152), which is in a sharp contrast to the present situation. The fact that the original German name *Seichenreuth* was replaced by the official Czech name as late as in 1961, is rather striking in this context. This delay was caused by problems with the approval of the new Czech name. The local authority refused the suggested names *Kopaniny* or *Klučeniny,* both meaning 'cleared land', corresponding to the meaning of the second element of the original German name -*reuth,* and tried to enforce the name *Vlastislav.* This form exists as a place name belonging to a village and old castle. The place name *Vlastislav* is derived by an old possessive suffix -*jь* from the personal name *Vlastislav* (a compound of *vlast* 'homeland' and -*slav* found in *sláva* 'glory' or *slavný* 'glorious, famous'); it referred to 'Vlastislav's castle'. The motivation of the name *Vlastislav* newly suggested for the original village of *Seichenreuth,* was political: it was to express relations to the homeland, understood as a progressive communist country in this period. The name *Vlastislav* was to express the contribution of the village to the "glory" of the "homeland", namely the fact that the local cooperative farm contributed to the accomplishment of the compulsory agricultural state supplies.[4] The name *Vlastislav* was rejected by the toponymical committee, because "place names should not express such facts" (BURDOVÁ 1972: 213–214). Another possible reason for its rejection could be the fact that newly created names should have respected the contemporary productive types of place names, not using old and no longer productive ones. Finally, the name *Táborská* was approved; this name

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[4] In the late 1940's and in 1950's, there was a tendency to create new politically motivated oikonyms in the countries of the Soviet block. Some of these proposals were rather absurd, cf. some of the suggestions for the new city of Havířov situated in a coal mine region, gathered by a public inquiry in 1955, cf. *Brygadobytostav* (a compoud form the components *brigáda* 'voluntary work', *byt* 'flat, apartment' and *stavět* 'build' or *Šachtoslav* (from *šachta* 'shaft; mine' and *sláva* 'glory', etc.; see DAVID 2011: 285–295). Also the name *Vlastislav* for the former *Seichenreuth* must be understood in this context of these proposed "progressive" names expressing the "building" of socialism. Such names were finally not accepted by the authorities in Czechoslovakia.

was derived from the place name *Tábor* belonging to a city in South Bohemia. The naming motive was based on the fact that most of the colonists came from the Tábor region. However, the proposed name *Vlastislav* was not forgotten in this locality. According to archival sources, this name was used for Seichenreuth already since 1947 (RÁJKOVÁ 2005), though without the approval of the state authorities. As it emerges from the official list of watercourses, a brook running through the locality had the official name *Vlastislavský potok* 'Vlastislav Brook' in 2003, and probably also long before this year (see *Nařízení vlády č. 71/2003 Sb.,* online), though the settlement was officially called *Táborská* (cf. also DAVID–SOUKUP 2010: 206). In 2016, the local authority of the municipality of Hazlov decided to "restore" the place name *Vlastislav,* which was unofficially used for *Táborská* in 1950's. The reason for this decision was the ambiguity of the name *Táborská,* which belongs also to one of the streets in the nearby town of Aš. This fact makes orientation and finding addresses difficult. According to the quoted law, the Ministry of Interior only took this change of the name of the municipal part into account. Unlike in the period after 1945, onomasticians had no opportunity to influence the name change. Thus, the name *Vlastislav* was finally approved almost 70 years after the first attempts to implement it. This interesting example illustrates that onomasticians usually do not play any role in approving changes of oikonyms nowadays in the Czech Republic, though the situation used to be different in the past.

As regards street names, onomasticians can, to some extent, influence the individual names at least in the cities such as Prague or Brno as members of local nomenclature committees, which, however, have only advisory competences. Otherwise, onomasticians have no competence to influence street names. This results in the fact that street names sometimes include linguistically corrupted forms, with orthographic, morphological or word-formation mistakes, for example: *Rooseweltova* 'Roose**v**elt Street', *Radouňova* from place name *Radouň* (the possessive suffix *-ova* is used in connection with anthroponyms, not toponyms; the correct form of the street name should be *Radouňská*), *Za Zahradama* (substandard morphological form; the standard form should be *Za Zahradami*), *Zelenýho* (substandard morphological form; the standard form should be *Zeleného*).

In the case of street names, onomasticians are consulted only exceptionally. Several years ago, the Institute of the Czech Language was asked for an opinion concerning the street name *Města Lwówek Śląski* (street in Chrastava in North Bohemia, which was to be named in tribute to Chrastava's partner city *Lwówek Śląski* in Poland). However, in accordance with the law, the only question of the Ministry of Interior was whether the given street name "is in Czech or not, if it includes Polish diacritics that do not exist in Czech". The answer was that the name is in Czech, using the Polish endonym, for which a Czech exonym is

not used. Thus, the name was finally taken into account by the ministry without any further objections.

3. Conclusion

Comparing the two analysed categories of proper names, it becomes evident that there is significant imbalance between the relatively strict regulation in the field of anthroponyms and almost absolute freedom, lack of central regulation and almost no impact of onomasticians in the field of oikonyms and street names. However, toponyms, especially oikonyms and street names, are of extreme social and even political significance, which is in no extent smaller in comparison to the social relevance of anthroponyms, considering the fact that geographical localities such as settlements and streets are usually known and referred to by more language users than average anthroponymic objects, i.e. "ordinary" people, and the duration of toponymical objects and their names is usually much longer. As it can be seen from the example of the oikonym *Vlastislav* and its history, oikonyms had not always been without regulation and approval of onomasticians, though it must be taken into account that the period after 1945 was socially and politically specific.

It is rather paradoxical, in this context, that while oikonyms and street names are in competence of the individual municipalities, names of unsettled geographical objects are centrally standardised in the Czech Republic. Due to the valid version of the law of land surveying, this standardisation is in competence of the Czech Office for Surveying, Mapping and Cadastre (*Jazyková pravidla pro standardizaci jmen nesídelních geografických objektů z území České republiky* 2015: 4). According to this law, standardisation of geographic nomenclature is a process of land surveying performed in public interest. However, names of municipalities, their parts, names of streets and other urban public spaces (as well as names of the state, regions, communications and public buildings), though they would be equally or even more important from the point of view of land surveying, are not in competence of this office (see *Jazyková pravidla pro standardizaci jmen nesídelních geografických objektů z území České republiky* 2015: 10).

It would be immensely interesting and important to compare the language policy in the area of both anthroponyms and toponyms with the situation in other countries, both European (cf. *Onoma* 2012) and extra-European.

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Abstract

The paper focuses on the issue of the name policy in Czech Republic. The process of namegiving is investigated from the point of view of its legal regulation and the role of experts, namely onomasticians, in this process. Two basic categories of proper names are examined: anthroponyms (particularly given names) and toponyms (with a focus on oikonyms and street names). Comparing the two analysed categories of proper names, it becomes evident that there is significant imbalance between the relatively strict regulation in the field of anthroponyms and almost absolute freedom, lack of central regulation and almost no impact of onomasticians in the field of oikonyms and street names.

Keywords: anthroponyms, given names, toponyms, oikonyms, street names, name policy