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REPORT'S OF THE WORKING GROUPS

Report by the Convenor of the Working Group on Romanization Systems

(Submitted by Estonia)**

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This brief report covers the period since the twentieth session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names that was held in New York in January 2000. Full details will be given in the report of the Working Group to the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

The Working Group met during the 20th session of UNGEGN in New York (2000), and following an invitation from the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use had a two-day meeting in London in May 2001. In the interval between the meetings, correspondence with members of the Working Group was conducted mainly by e-mail.

WORKING GROUP'S WEBSITE

After the Working Group had presented a comprehensive document "United Nations Romanization Systems for Geographical Names. Preliminary Report on Their Current Status" to the 20th session of UNGEGN, it was thought necessary to improve the report and post it on the Internet. Considering remarks and suggestions made by experts on the text of the report during and after the UNGEGN session, version 1.3 was finalized and made available at the Working Group's newly established website <http://www.eki.ee/wgrs/> March 2001. Server log files show that the report is being actively used and references to the website have been included at various Internet addresses devoted to specific languages or to technical issues like the application of Unicode or romanization.

BYELORUSSIAN

A new national system of romanization was approved by the Government Committee on Land Resources, Geodesy and Cartography, Republic of Belarus, on 23 November 2000, modifying an earlier version dating from 1998. The system is based on GOST 1983, taking into account the peculiarities of the Byelorussian orthography. The information is based on an official decree issued by the government of Belarus. No reply has been received to a letter of inquiry by the Convenor to the Belarus national authorities (November 2001).

GEORGIAN

The Convenor has been in contact with the national authorities responsible for the standardization of geographical names in Georgia. The first draft of the romanization of Georgian was communicated to the Working Group in July 2001. After attempting to put the system into practice, and consultations with members of the Working Group, a new system of romanization was worked out and approved by the Georgian authorities in early 2002. Although the information is yet preliminary and needs further verification, it certainly is a very encouraging development that proves the usefulness of having a dialogue between the donor country and experts on geographical names from countries where the proposed system will eventually be used.

KOREAN

During the 20th session of UNGEGN, a new romanization system was presented in Working Paper No. 48. Subsequently, the Working Group received information that the new official system of romanization for Korean had been promulgated by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Republic of Korea in July 2000. Members of the Working Group were mindful of

the efforts made by experts from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea, begun in 1989, seeking to agree on a single international system for the romanization of geographical names.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Letters of inquiry regarding romanization systems have also been sent out to Armenia (The H. Atcharian Institute of Language, May 2001), Cambodia (Service Géographique du Cambodge, October 2000, repeatedly by the I.G.N. of France in June 2001), Thailand (Royal Thai Survey Department, November 2001), and Ukraine (Main Administration of Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre, May 2001) but no replies have been received.

The Working Group has considered that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the use of new official Roman alphabets for the Turkmen and Uzbek languages in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, respectively, has become stable. Thus, these languages now fall outside the scope of consideration of the Working Group.

The document "United Nations Romanization Systems for Geographical Names. Report on Their Current Status" has been updated and will be presented to the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.