Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
21 May 2012
Original: English

Tenth United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names
New York, 31 July – 9 August 2012
Item 13 (a) of the provisional agenda
Writing systems and pronunciation: Romanization

Statement of the Austrian Board on Geographical Names (AKO) as regards Romanization of the Ukrainian Cyrillic alphabet

Submitted by Austria**

---

* E/CONF.101/1.
** Prepared by Peter Jordan (Austria), Austrian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Urban and Regional Research and Chair, Austrian Board on Geographical Names

Statement of the Austrian Board on Geographical Names (AKO) as regards Romanization of the Ukrainian Cyrillic alphabet

Resolutions of the conferences of the United Nations for the standardization of geographical names have so far pursued the goal to support for the purpose of international communication conversions of non-Roman alphabetic scripts into Roman alphabets by the principle of reversible unambiguous transliteration and not to accept conversion systems following the principle of receiver-language oriented phonetic transcriptions, even when those are proposed by the donor country and applied by it.

The Austrian Board on Geographical Names (AKO) holds the opinion that also with conversion of the Ukrainian Cyrillic alphabet the principle of reversible unambiguous transliteration has to be applied and asks the 10th Conference of the United Nations for the Standardization of Geographical Names to insist on this principle.

From the AKO's point of view the following reasons favour the transliteration principle (i.e. the conversion of every single letter of a donor alphabet into a single letter of the receiver alphabet, also by using diacritical marks):

- It is only this principle that ensures the unambiguous reconversion into the donor alphabet – especially important in science and for libraries, but also essential for standardization, since it reduces the probability of errors considerably.
- It is this principle that ensures that similar names in related languages, one of which is written in Roman and the other in non-Roman script (e.g. Slovakian versus Ukrainian; Croatian versus Serbian), are written similar in Latin script.
- It is this principle that ensures that similar names in related languages written in non-Roman scripts, one of which uses a transliteration system acknowledged by the United Nations (e.g. Russian versus Ukrainian or Belorussian; Macedonian or Serbian versus Bulgarian), are written similar in Latin script.
- It is this principle that facilitates mechanical conversion.
- Transliteration systems follow linguistic criteria and are therefore less exposed to societal changes.

For the following reasons AKO does not support the argument frequently brought forward in favour of English-phonetic transcriptions, i.e. that English as a global language and well-known as regards its pronunciation was the most appropriate key to pronunciation of originally non-Roman names:

- Learning the correct pronunciation of a name written by the English alphabet needs – except for an English native speaker – no less effort than learning the special letters of a transliteration alphabet.
- Right the English language witnesses a lot of irregular pronunciations (e.g. *cushion, butcher, Worcester, Leicester, Tucson*) reducing the probability to hit the pronunciation of a name in its donor language and enlarging the possibility of mispronunciations.
- English orthography is highly non-phonemic, i.e. it has a very low degree of grapheme-phoneme correspondence. Phonemes noted by English letters and letter combinations do certainly not always coincide with the phonemes of a name in the donor language. It may frequently rather be so that the alphabet of this receiver language impedes access to the correct pronunciation of a name in the donor language.
- Pronunciation matters only in spoken communication, while unambiguous reversibility is essential in almost all fields of communication. Unambiguous reversibility ranks therefore

higher than correct pronunciation, which can anyway hardly fully be achieved with names in foreign languages.