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PRINCIPLES OF ROMANIZATION

submitted by

Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia,
Finland, Federal Republic of Germany, Hungary,
Luxembourg and Switzerland

MEMORANDUM
ADDRESSED TO THE CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEE III
by the Delegations of
AUSTRIA, BELGIUM, BULGARIA, CZECHOSLOVAKIA, FINLAND,
GERMANY, HUNGARY, LUXEMBOURG AND SWITZERLAND

Principles of Romanization

Delegates of the above mentioned countries, in recommending measures for a solution to the romanization problem at an international level, present their views as to what could be the solution and what measures should be taken to arrive at it.

I.

We shall deal with the solution first and make the following points:

1. Almost every language community needs, more or less, a simple, popular romanization system which, in most cases, will be produced by means of its own alphabet only. These views have been expressed by the distinguished delegates of Hungary, Poland, Federal Republic of Germany and others. In general no language community will adopt the popular romanizations of another one. Therefore a romanization based on the writing traditions or on the phonetic structure of a single receiver language has little or no chance to be accepted internationally. This problem is an old one and has been solved already for some writing systems:

Thus, the experts in Slavonic studies all over the world have, since a long time, used a romanization of cyrillic script based on letters of Slavonic Latin alphabets (Czech and Croatian) which, scientifically, is the most exact solution. Orientalists all over the world have agreed on a romanization of Arab characters which is not based on the peculiarities of an individual language of the latin writing system.

These romanizations are intended for scientific and international purposes only, and this is exactly what we need here. Therefore, the scholarly romanizations of the linguists and philologists must be taken into account, as it has already been done so by the ISO.

2. For international use we cannot have different romanizations for different fields of application. Cartography for international use and international documentation must in every case use the same romanization. In every documentation room you will find a reference atlas - its use would be diminished if it employs other romanizations than the documentation itself.

3. For the romanization of non-Latin alphabets for scientific and international use, only transliterations and not transcriptions should be used. Reversibility is indispensable in all scientific work, and therefore in geography too. The fact that complete reversibility in existing romanizations is not always achieved, is not in itself an objection against transliteration.

4. The principle that users of the receiver system and not the users of the donor system have to decide on the formation of the romanization is a sound one, but a final decision on romanization for international use should be based on international agreement, and that, of course, includes participation and final consent and acceptance by the users of the donor system as well. As an intermediate state it will happen that a country with a non-Latin script officially uses a romanization different from one in international use already. Then gazetteers outside the country will use both systems, as the Duden-Gazetteer of Europe does in Macedonia, whereas maps will use that system which is best suited to their purposes. Thus, a street map of Lebanon will use the French romanization official in that country, in order that the motorist may be correctly guided by official signposts on the crossroads.

A small scale map of the Mediterranean countries extending from Morocco to Iraq, may use the international transliteration of the ISO.

The acceptance by Latin writing countries of official romanization of non-Latin writing countries is the logical extension of the Roman alphabet rule.

II.

What measure should be taken to arrive at a solution to our problem?

1. We agree that the International Organization for Standardization is the central body dealing with romanization on an international level. Otherwise a confusing duplication of work and results is unavoidable. We are all willing to assist and encourage this organization in its difficult work. This could be done through our national organizations for standardization, or by direct contact with the planned U.N. Permanent Commission on Geographical Names and the ISO - the latter being, perhaps, the better way.

2. A special group of experts should study the recommendations and drafts for recommendations of the ISO thoroughly and if necessary propose amendments.

3. Where there exist some differences between an ISO romanization and the romanization officially acknowledged by a country with a non-Latin alphabet, the United Nations Permanent Commission on Geographical Names should ask the ISO to co-operate with the countries concerned in eliminating these differences. This could be done easily in the case of the Soviet Union and Bulgaria.

4. The U.N. Permanent Commission on Geographical Names should ask the ISO to work out, within a short time, further romanization tables for those alphabets or writing systems that are of cartographical importance.

The ideal final solution would be:

A complete series of ISO romanization tables for international use, which will be acceptable by all countries of the world and consequently by all national names committees.

In addition to these international romanizations, there will remain in existence national systems for internal use only with a status roughly comparable to that of conventional names.