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Standardization of Geographical Names**
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Writing systems: Romanization

**Report of the Working Group on Romanization Systems:
activities from August 2002 to June 2007**

Submitted by the UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems**

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Summary

The report outlines the main activities of the UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems from August 2002 to June 2007. The Working Group had a two-day meeting in Tallinn in October 2006, as well as informal meetings during the 8th UNCSGN and UNGEGN sessions.

The updated report on the United Nations romanization systems for geographical names has been published as part of the Technical Reference Manual for the Standardization of Geographical Names (2007).

During the period between the Eighth and Ninth United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names there have been new developments regarding the romanization of Armenian, Bulgarian, Byelorussian, Hebrew, and Persian, new information and clarifications have been received on Amharic, Georgian, Kazakh, Khmer, Mongolian. The system of romanization for Ukrainian should meet the criteria for international approval.

1. The report covers the period since the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in Berlin in 2002. The Working Group has the following members: Mr. Ass'ad S. Abdo (Saudi Arabia), Mr. Brahim Atoui (Algeria), Mrs. Caroline Burgess (United Kingdom), Mme. Élisabeth Calvarin (France), Ms. Catherine Cheetham (United Kingdom), Mr. Randall E. Flynn (United States), Mr. Charles M. Heyda (United States), Mr. Naftali Kadmon (Israel), Mr. Mehran Maghsoudi (Islamic Republic of Iran), Mr. Peeter Päll (Convenor, Estonia), Mr. Walter Petrovitz (Holy See), Mr. Gerd Quinting (United States), Mr. Alessandro Toniolo (Italy), Mr. Peter D. Viechnicki (United States), Mr. Paul J. Woodman (United Kingdom), Mr. Bogusław Zagórski (Poland).

MEETINGS

2. The UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems had informal meetings at the 8th UNCSGN in Berlin (August-September 2002) and at both sessions of UNGEGN held before the 9th UNCSGN (22nd Session in New York, April 2004, and 23rd Session in Vienna, March-April 2006). In conjunction with a meeting of the Baltic Division of UNGEGN, a two-day meeting of the Working Group was held in Tallinn, Estonia, on 9-10 October 2006. The full report of the meeting, and the documents from it, are available online on the Working Group's website at <http://www.eki.ee/wgrs/>. The report was also published in the UNGEGN Information Bulletin No. 33 (March 2007).

REPORT ON THE UNITED NATIONS ROMANIZATION SYSTEMS FOR GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

3. One of the main results of the activities of the Working Group has been the compilation and updating of a comprehensive report on romanization, *Report on the Current Status of the United Nations Romanization Systems for Geographical Names*. The aim of the report is to clarify the present status and the degree of implementation of the United Nations and other romanization systems used for converting geographical names from writing systems other than Roman. The first version was made public in March 2000, since then the report has periodically been updated, and the latest online version, 2.2, dates from February 2003.

4. Following a resolution at the 8th UNCSGN, it was decided to publish, among others, the main content of the report, in a manual. *Technical reference manual for the standardization of geographical names* was published in 2007, and this contains slightly updated information on romanization systems which might be termed as version 2.3.

WEBSITE

5. The Working Group's website at <http://www.eki.ee/wgrs/> continues to be updated with new documents related to its activities. It contains all documents presented to UN conferences and UNGEGN sessions since 2000, and many documents presented at meetings of the Working Group. Since some time, the status report on individual romanization systems has been given in two versions for several languages: in PDF format and HTML format. The latter allows users to copy the content of the report and to modify it for national needs (e.g. in translating the explanatory notes to the tables). It is hoped that by the time of the 9th UNCSGN all tables will be available in both formats.

LANGUAGES/SCRIPTS COVERED BY SYSTEMS RECOMMENDED BY THE UNITED NATIONS

6. It has been established that currently the Ethiopian Mapping Authority uses a simplified version of the UN romanization system for **Amharic**, omitting all diacritical marks and apostrophes. Thus one might argue that the original system is not implemented any more.

7. At the 8th UNCSGN in 2002, experts of the Arabic Division of UNGEGN had finalised proposed modifications to the UN recommended romanization system for **Arabic**. At the meeting of the Arabic Division in Beirut in May 2007 these modifications were officially approved, and they will now be submitted to the League of Arab States for final approval.

8. It was reported in September 2006 at the meeting of the Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division of UNGEGN in L'viv, Ukraine, that the Bulgarian Ministry of Public Administration and Administrative Reform is sponsoring a new project called *Разбираема България / Comprehensible Bulgaria* that will introduce a new official romanization system for **Bulgarian**. In fact it coincides with a system already

reported by the WG earlier, the Bulgarian Council of Ministers system (April 1999), with one exception (character No. 23 in romanized *ts*, not *c* in the new system).

9. At the meeting of the Working Group in Tallinn (October 2006) it was reported that the Academy of the **Hebrew** Language had adopted a few changes into the official system of romanization. These would soon be published in the official government gazette. The principal proposed changes would be from *w* to *v*; from *z* to *ts*; and from *q* to *k*. In addition, the Royal Jordanian System was currently under consideration to be adopted for Arabic names in Israel.

10. In the period between the two UN conferences the Geography Department in Cambodia has provided some clarifications to the system of romanization currently employed in Cambodia for **Khmer** which is different from the UN system. These clarifications have been incorporated into the updated report as printed in the Technical Reference Manual.

11. At various UN and UNGEGN meetings the Islamic Republic of Iran has introduced three methods of representing **Persian** geographical names: narrow transcription, broad transcription, and transliteration. While the last method represents the system of romanization approved by the United Nations, there is increasing evidence that also the broad transcription method is used to romanize Persian geographical names in maps.

OTHER LANGUAGES/SCRIPTS

12. At the meeting of the Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division of UNGEGN in Kyiv (May-June 2005) the Armenian expert introduced a provisional romanization system for **Armenian**, developed by the Centre of Geodesy and Cadastre but since that no new information has been received.

13. The national system of romanization for **Byelorussian** has been used since 2000 but several modifications to the system have been under consideration for some time. These concern mostly the shape of diacritical marks used with some letters. In June 2007 the Convenor was informed that these modifications will be officially approved but the final version differed somewhat from the information that was given in 2006 at the Tallinn meeting (see the Working Group's website for details).

14. The national system of romanization for **Georgian** (2002) has so far been implemented only partially (more details are given in a report to the Tallinn meeting on the Working Group's website).

15. During 2006 there were more news on various options being considered in Kazakhstan to reform the **Kazakh** language; transition to Roman alphabet was one of the options.

16. In 2002 and 2006 the Republic of Korea presented to UNGEGN experts the system of romanization for **Korean**, adopted in 2000 and employed in that country.

17. In May 2007 a copy of the Mongolian standard MNS 5217 : 2003 for rendering **Mongolian** with Latin letters was received but it appears to have little relevance for

geographical names, and a national system of romanization is still under consideration.

18. The national system of romanization for **Ukrainian** (1996) has been stable in usage, and is currently awaiting final approval under the Law on Geographical Names. At its Tallinn meeting, the Working Group on Romanization Systems decided to support the UN resolution on the romanization of Ukrainian, if that will be presented by Ukraine at the 9th UNCSGN.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

18. There have been attempts by the Working Group members to contact also other donor countries to inquire about the status of the romanization systems employed or devised (notably, Dzongkha, Lao, Maldivian, Tigrinya) but no new information has been received.

19. An important issue being discussed at the meeting of the Working Group in Tallinn (2006) was the implementation of various UN resolutions concerning individual romanization systems. Because of changing national circumstances, a country which has sponsored a donor romanization system subsequently adopted by a resolution of the United Nations may find it difficult to maintain its own initial firm support for that system. Recognising this reality, the Working Group on Romanization Systems would like to be able to examine the status of resolutions pertaining to an individual romanization system if that system has not been implemented by the sponsoring donor nation within 10 years following the relevant resolution, or is no longer implemented by the sponsoring donor nation after that same period of time. To this end, a **resolution** will be proposed for the consideration of the Conference, presented in a separate document.

20. As it is necessary to continue discussion on some of the above-mentioned romanization systems once finalized and on newly developed systems for scripts not covered thus far, also to monitor the implementation of the systems, it is recommended that the Ninth Conference extend the mandate of the present Working Group on Romanization Systems.