

Twentieth Session  
New York, 17 – 28 January 2000

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Item 7  
of the Provisional Agenda

SUMMARY REPORTS OF THE WORKING GROUPS

Report by the Convenor of the Working Group on  
Romanization Systems

(Submitted by Estonia)

United Nations Group of  
Experts on Geographical Names

Twentieth Session  
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Item No. 7 of the Provisional Agenda: Summary Reports of the Working Groups

**REPORT BY THE CONVENOR OF  
THE WORKING GROUP ON ROMANIZATION SYSTEMS**

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The report covers the period since the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in New York in January 1998. The Working Group, as constituted at the 19th Session of UNGEGN held in conjunction with the Seventh Conference, is as follows:

Mr. Ass'ad S. Abdo (Saudi Arabia)  
Mr. Brahim Atoui (Algeria)  
Mrs. Caroline Burgess (United Kingdom)  
Mr. Randall E. Flynn (United States)  
Mr. Charles M. Heyda (United States)  
Mr. Naftali Kadmon (Israel)  
Ms. Juliette Moore (United Kingdom)  
Mr. Peeter Päll, Convenor (Estonia)  
Mr. Gerd Quinting (United States)  
Mr. Alessandro Toniolo (Italy)  
Mr. Paul J. Woodman (United Kingdom)

In 1999 the UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems has been preparing a summary of romanization systems in the context of the activities of UNGEGN. The aim of the report is to clarify the present status and the degree of implementation of the United Nations romanization systems used for converting geographical names from other writing systems than Roman. The full report covers all languages with non-Roman writing systems as identified in the Report of the Working Group on Toponymic Data Exchange Formats and Standards to the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (Document E/CONF.91/CRP.11). The report will be presented separately to the 20th Session of UNGEGN.

In compiling the report the following new information was obtained concerning some of the languages mentioned.

**BELARUSIAN**

A new national system of romanization for Belarusian names was approved by the State Committee on Land Resources, Geodesy and Cartography, Republic of Belarus, on 20th of March, 1998. The scheme was also supported by the Y. Kolas Institute of Linguistics and the Republic Committee on Toponymy at the Belarusian Academy of Sciences. While the system is still based on GOST 1983, it takes more precisely into account the peculiarities of the Belarusian orthography. So far, it remains to be seen, how it will be implemented on national maps and other documentation.

## BULGARIAN

It was mentioned in the report of Bulgaria to the 15th session of the UNGEGN Division of East Central and South East Europe (Ljubljana 1999) that currently two systems are being discussed by the Bulgarian Council of Orthography and Transcription for adoption, one of them being the system approved by the Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 1977 (resolution III/10). The final outcome of the discussions is not yet known to the Working Group.

## DZONGKHA

In September 1991 a phonological romanization for Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan, was introduced as an official standard by the Chairman of the Dzongkha Development Commission. Roman Dzongkha, as it was called, was not intended to replace traditional Bhutanese writing, but to accurately and adequately represent the phonology of the living language and to serve as a standard for representing Dzongkha names and words in the international media. However, the actual use of the system in Bhutan at present cannot be verified. Existing sources, including Bhutanese media (the Kuensel newspaper), seem to continue using traditional name forms.

## RUSSIAN

In the materials of the 3rd session of the Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division of UNGEGN (Moscow, June 1999) it was noted that a new version of the rules for the transliteration of the geographical names of the Russian Federation had been prepared. This would not however change the content of the romanization table.

## OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Modifications to the romanization system of Thai (approved by the United Nations in 1967) await approval by the next United Nations conference on the standardization of geographical names. The system was received by the Working Group on Romanization Systems already in 1997 and there seem to be no changes made thereafter.

No decision is yet known to have been taken in Israel concerning the proposed changes to the romanization system of Hebrew.

In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan there is increasing evidence of the use of the new officially approved Roman alphabets for the Turkmen and Uzbek languages, respectively. As the use of Roman alphabets will be more and more stable in these countries, it is anticipated that the named languages would thus soon fall outside the scope of consideration of the Working Group.

No new information has been obtained concerning other languages using non-Roman scripts.

## WORKING GROUP AGENDA

It is recommended that the Working Group would hold a technical meeting during the 20th Session of UNGEGN to discuss the following items:

1. Preliminary report on the current status of the United Nations romanization systems.
2. Possible publication of the report and associated materials on the Internet or by other methods.
3. Plan of actions for the next period between the UNGEGN sessions.