

**Twenty-fifth session
Nairobi, 5–12 May 2009**

Item 12 of the provisional agenda

Activities relating to the Working Group on Romanization Systems

Report of the Working Group on Romanization Systems *

* Prepared by Peeter Päll (Estonia), Convenor of the Working Group.

REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON ROMANIZATION SYSTEMS

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The report covers activities of the working group since the Ninth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN, New York 2007). The basic mandate of the working group consists of considering and reaching agreement on a romanization system for geographical names proposed by a donor country. The WG also monitors the implementation of romanization systems in donor and receiver countries.

1. Meetings

There was a brief informal meeting of the working group during the 9th UNCSGN in New York (August 2007). Main items discussed were the status of various romanization systems (Arabic, Bulgarian, Hebrew, Sinhalese, Ukrainian).

No other meetings have taken place, but contacts with working group members have been kept by e-mail.

2. Website

The WG website www.eki.ee/wgrs has been updated with links to all new documents submitted to the last UNCSGN. Following the resolution on the romanization of Hebrew (IX/9), the WG document on Hebrew was updated, to reflect the amended system. New information made it also possible to update WG reports on Bulgarian and Byelorussian (based on the documents submitted at the UNCSGN) and Tigrinya (containing the BGN/PCGN 2007 System).

Since September 2007 all documents on various romanization systems are downloadable either in PDF or HTML format. In order to facilitate access to romanization systems and for processing the information more readily, it has been considered useful to provide users with Unicode-compatible HTML versions of the romanization systems, in addition to the PDF versions published earlier. Users should, however, be aware that the texts of the PDF and HTML versions are not identical, although the main content is unchanged. (In HTML versions it is sometimes technically difficult or not reliable to display correctly combining diacritical marks or glyph variations. Also, some aspects of encoding non-Roman scripts are still open for discussion and might be changed in the future.) In case of discrepancies the PDF version should always be considered as the primary, or official version.

3. Publications

Although the WG has not had any publications of its own, it should be mentioned that in September 2008, the sixth edition of *Romanization Systems and Roman-Script Spelling Conventions* was published by the U.S. National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. This volume

contains all of the romanization systems approved by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN) and the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use (PCGN). The publication also contains Unicode values for letters used in romanization.

4. Other activities

There has been a discussion with convenors of the working groups on country names and on toponymic data files and gazetteers over the application of ISO language codes in UNGEGN reports – whether ISO 639-1, 639-2 or 639-3 would suit best the needs of working groups. This discussion is expected to continue at the 25th UNGEGN Session.

Also, in collaboration with the Working Group on Country Names information on country names in the original spelling and in romanization was provided for the UNGEGN Geographical Names Database.

5. Membership

Current members of the WG are 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 (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 R. Zagórski (Poland).

6. Information on languages/scripts on the agenda of the working group.

A. Languages/scripts covered by systems recommended by the United Nations

ARABIC

UNGEGN Information Bulletin No 35 (August 2008) reported that the 4th Arab Conference on Geographical Names held in Beirut from 16 to 22 June 2008 confirmed the endorsement of a standard romanization system for Arabic geographical names, a link to the document on the Internet is also provided.

BULGARIAN

Bulgaria submitted a document (E/CONF.98/CRP.71) to the 9th UNCSGN presenting the new romanization system, officially valid in Bulgaria since 26 October 2006 for writing geographical names. Effectively, this system renders obsolete the UNCSGN resolution III/10 (1977) which is based on the former official table, and a new resolution is needed at the next UNCSGN in 2012. The system is also applied in cartographic products as illustrated in the 2007 *Administrative Atlas: Republic of Bulgaria*.

B. Other languages/scripts

ARMENIAN

During the meeting of the UNGEGN Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division in Sofia (May 2008) some more information was obtained on the current status of romanization in Armenia. There are as yet no official drafts for a romanization system, so the WG report to the 23rd Session of UNGEGN (2006) proved to be premature.

KOREAN

Documents on the romanization of Korean were submitted to the 9th UNCSGN in 2007 by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (E/CONF.98/CRP.90) and by the Republic of Korea (E/CONF.98/CRP.43). In December 2007 the International Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names with Special Reference to the East Sea was held in Seoul, Republic of Korea, where a paper presented by the convenor of the Working Group on Romanization Systems addressed the issues of UN romanization systems.

SINHALESE

During the 9th UNCSGN in connection with the discussion on how should be the correct Sinhalese spelling of the country name Sri Lanka, a possibility of devising a national system of romanization was mentioned, but no other developments can be reported.

UKRAINIAN

It has been reported that the status of national romanization system is still under discussion and in spite of recent changes in the legal framework, current system (1996) continues to be used in producing maps.