

**Twenty-sixth session
Vienna, 2-6 May 2011**

Item 11 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, Convenor of the Working Group

The report covers activities of the working group since the 25th Session of UNGEGN (Nairobi 2009). 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 25th Session in Nairobi (May 2009). Main items discussed were the status of various romanization systems (Arabic, Persian, French romanization systems for several languages, etc.), also plans for the future.

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, after obtaining some new information regarding the implementation of various romanization systems. Since 2009, the documents on Macedonian Cyrillic, Nepali, Georgian and Ukrainian have been updated (for more details please see item 5 in this report). All romanization systems continue to be available for download as PDF and HTML documents.

Thanks to scanned copies of documents from earlier sessions available on the UNGEGN website the WG website has also included links to all previous WG reports presented since the formation of the working group at the 2nd Session of UNGEGN in 1970.

3. Other activities

There has been an ongoing collaboration of the WG with other UNGEGN working groups and projects, regarding the use of romanized names in documents: the UNGEGN Database, the list of country names maintained by the Working Group on Country Names, etc.

During the Nairobi session there was a discussion of a proposal by ICANN, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers for cooperation with UNGEGN in certain fields. One of such areas of interest was the new initiative of ICANN in allowing non-Roman scripts as TLD names. At the Nairobi session it was decided that the Working Group on Romanization Systems act as an expert body in cases where third-party assistance is needed in applying for new non-Roman-script country-code Internationalized Domain Names. It was envisaged that the applying countries themselves would provide for the necessary linguistic and/or toponymic expertise in preparing their applications but if needed they could turn to international experts, and the Working Group could then assist. During the summer 2009 there was collaboration with Mr. Bernard Turcotte from ICANN to provide guidelines

for such applications, and these were then approved by ICANN at their Seoul meeting. After that, there has been only one case when advice from the WG was sought.

The WG has taken note of the Unicode Transliteration Guidelines (<http://cldr.unicode.org/index/cldr-spec/transliteration-guidelines>) which has a huge potential in being used for automatic script conversion in several applications, including Google Maps. The UN-approved systems are included as one of the methods of conversion, therefore it would seem to be beneficial to liaise with the team behind the project.

4. Membership

Current members of the WG are Mr. Ass'ad S. Abdo (Saudi Arabia), Mr. Brahim Atoui (Algeria), Mr. Jesse J. Bisogni (United States), Mr. Abolfazl Bolandian (Islamic Republic of Iran), Mrs. Caroline Burgess (United Kingdom), Mme. Élisabeth Calvarin (France), Mr. Jeffrey M. Carnes (United States), Ms. Catherine Cheetham (United Kingdom), Mr. Randall E. Flynn (United States), Mr. Benjamin D. Foster (United States), Mr. David A. Gunn (United States), Mr. Naftali Kadmon (Israel), Ms. Becki Maddock (United Kingdom), 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. Paul J. Woodman (United Kingdom), Mr. Bogusław R. Zagórski (Poland).

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

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

ARABIC

On May 26–29, 2010 the 5th Arab Conference on Geographical Names was held in Beirut, Lebanon. One of the main items discussed was the unified system for the romanization of Arabic (2007). It was recommended that all Arabic Division member countries continue to implement this system and the League of Arab States seek the official approval of the state members on the implementation of the system through its appropriate institutions. At the next meeting of the Arabic Division in 2012 a draft resolution would be prepared for the 10th UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

As the convenor of the WG was also able to participate at the meeting, there was discussion on some technical aspects of the romanization system, particularly on the need to follow strictly the Unicode encoding of characters. The WG would also reiterate that some technical modifications were needed in order to facilitate the implementation of the system.

MACEDONIAN CYRILLIC

The attention of the Working Group has been drawn to a publication on the language's orthography, *Правопис на македонскиот литературен јазик* (Skopje 1998) where a system of romanization was presented which is different from the UN-approved one. This raises the question whether the UN-approved system is applied in The former Yugoslav

Republic of Macedonia at present; more research is needed. The WG document on Macedonian Cyrillic has been updated to reflect the new information.

NEPALI

The current UN-approved system has never been implemented in Nepal, but it is only now that details are available on the system of romanization applied by the Nepal Survey Department (NSD), especially in its Geographic Information Infrastructure Programme (available online at <http://www.ngiip.gov.np/geographical.php>). Summary of the new system has been included in the updated document on Nepali.

B. Other languages/scripts

GEORGIAN

Currently there is no change in the national system of romanization (2002) reported earlier but the document on Georgian has been updated to reflect the fact that in 2009 the BGN/PCGN 1981 system was retired in favour of the Georgian national system.

MALDIVIAN

In November 2008 the Ministry of Planning and National Development published an Official Atlas of the Maldives with details of slight revisions to the official romanization system of 1987. The index contains names both in the altered romanization and the original script.

UKRAINIAN

On January 27, 2010 the Ukrainian Government adopted new rules for the romanization of Ukrainian. The rules will apply both to personal names and geographical names. The system is based on the previous system of 1996 with three differences: 1) character 30 (ш) is rendered shch (not sch); 2) characters 33 (ь) and 34 (') are not romanized. In a letter to the convenor of the WG, Mr. Volodymyr Kulinich, Head of the State Service of Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre restated the aim of Ukraine to submit this system for approval at the next UN conference on the standardization of geographical names in 2012. The WG document on Ukrainian has been updated respectively.