Item 11 of the Provisional Agenda

Activities relating to the Working Group on
Romanization Systems

Report of the Working Group on Romanization Systems *

Report of the Working Group on Romanization Systems

Summary

The report covers activities of the working group since the 10th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN, 2012). 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. The 10th UNCSGN adopted four resolutions on romanization, recommending the respective Belarusian, Bulgarian, Persian and Ukrainian national systems of romanization for international use.

1. Meetings

There was a meeting of the working group during the 10th UNCSGN on 3 August 2012. The WG considered systems of romanization proposed for adoption at the Conference. There were still differing opinions on the acceptability of Bulgarian and Ukrainian systems, while for Belarusian and Persian no further objections were raised. All these systems had thoroughly been discussed at a previous meeting of the WG in Gdańsk (May 2012). The WG also heard further information on the status of Arabic and Georgian romanization systems.

No further meetings have taken place but correspondence between WG members has been kept by e-mail.

2. Website

Since four new systems were approved at the 10th UNCSGN, it became necessary to update the comprehensive *Report on the Current Status of United Nations Romanization Systems for Geographical Names*. Version 4.0 was started in February 2013 and as of February 2014, 20 of the 44 individual sections on languages/scripts have been updated (Belarusian, Bulgarian, Chinese, Hebrew, Khmer, Macedonian Cyrillic, Mongolian (in China), Nepali, Persian, Thai, Tibetan, Uighur, Ukrainian; Burmese, Dzongkha, Georgian, Japanese, Korean, Lao, Tigrinya). Apart from the four updated systems, changes in other sections were mainly of a technical character, e.g. adding references to new submitted documents. In one case (Burmese) the inventory of used characters was revised, omitting obsolete combinations. The current number of approved UN systems is 30.

The website content was reorganized into sections, allowing quicker access to various documents.

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.

In June 2013 there was the first meeting in Paris of the re-established working group within **ISO**, the International Organization for Standardization, dealing with the conversion of scripts (ISO TC46 / WG3). Mr. François Demay from France had accepted the convenorship for that working group. There were a little more than 10 experts participating. The main discussions were about the future agenda of the WG. One topic discussed was the question, whether and how could the two working groups (within UNGEGN and ISO) cooperate. Various ideas were circulated, among them the understanding that ISO would concentrate more in transliterations that are useful in information (particularly for libraries) and leave aside the so-called simplified conversions which should be the sphere of activities for the UNGEGN working group. The revision of ISO 7098 „Romanization of Chinese" was also discussed and the expert from China presented the main changes, among them the most debatable was the question of word division in Chinese.

As the convenor of the ISO TC46 / WG3 later resigned, it became necessary to propose a new one and the convenor of the UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems agreed to act as a provisional convenor for the ISO working group, in order not to hinder the undergoing projects of the working group.

4. Membership

Current members of the WG are Mr Ass'ad S. Abdo (Saudi Arabia), Mr Brahim Atoui (Algeria), Mr Hubert Bergmann (Austria), 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 Sungjae Choo (Republic of Korea), Mr Randall E. Flynn (United States), Mr Benjamin D. Foster (United States), Mr David A. Gunn (United States), Mr Peter Jordan (Austria), Mr Naftali Kadmon (Israel), Mr Gholamreza Karimzadeh (Islamic Republic of Iran), Mr Liu Lianan (China), Ms Becki Maddock (United Kingdom), Mr Mehran Maghsoudi (Islamic Republic of Iran), Mr Peeter Päll (convenor, Estonia), Mr Trent C. Palmer (United States), Mr Walter Petrovitz (Holy See), Mr Alexandros Stavropoulos (Greece), Mr Tjeerd Tichelaar (Netherlands), Mr Alessandro Toniolo (Italy), Mr Paul J. Woodman (United Kingdom), Mr Bogusław R. Zagórski (Poland). Some of WG members have retired from active service but continue to be associated with the working group.

5. Information on languages/scripts on the agenda of the working group[1]

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

ARABIC

For later in 2014, a regional meeting is being planned in Algeria, on the standardization of geographical names, one of the topics being the romanization of Arabic geographical names.

BELARUSIAN

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[1] Information for this section was provided, inter alia, by Mr Brahim Atoui (Algeria), Ms Irina Borodich (Belarus), Ms Gloria Djadjeva (Bulgaria), Mr Chharom Chin (Cambodia), the Secretariat of the Iranian Committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names, Ms Nataliia Kizilova (Ukraine), Mr Artur Avdalyan (Armenia), Ms Shukia Apridonidze (Georgia).

The State Committee of the Property of the Republic of Belarus reported further implementation of the romanization system for Belarusian adopted by the 10th UNCSGN – in preparation for the world championship in ice hockey (2014) new signs had been posted on streets and metro stations using the official romanization system. The system continued to be used in Belarusian cartographic products.

BULGARIAN

Bulgaria reported that the romanization system adopted at the 10th UNCSGN was still widely used in Bulgaria. The system was applied in all cartographic products, maps, atlases and gazetteers. By the end of 2014, the work on the development of the Register of Geographical Names would be completed, and in this register one of the attributes of geographical names would be their romanized form in accordance with the approved romanization system.

KHMER

In July 2013 the convenor of the WG had an informal meeting in Phnom Penh with Mr So Vanna, Director of the Geography Department under the Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning & Construction, and Mr. Chin Chharom, Deputy Director of the same department. Present was also H. E. Mr Ith Sotha, Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry.

It was stated that Cambodia will work with the aim of having a system on romanization ready for approval at the next UN Conference in 2017. The National Committee on Geographical Names (NCGN) is working with this plan of actions. To date the NCGN has approved the 24 well-known names of provinces or cities that are not complying with any romanization system. The rest of geographical names are still under discussion for the adoption using romanization system, which is currently the so-called provisional system, as described in the WGRS document on Khmer. This system continues to be used by the mapping authority and is very much the *de facto* system used in the country, so it is not likely that any future system will depart significantly from that.

PERSIAN

The Islamic Republic of Iran reported that the Vice-Presidency of Strategic Planning and Supervision to the governmental sector had issued an order for the implementation of the official romanization system, adopted at the 10th UNCSGN. Among others, the Statistical Centre of Iran and the Housing Foundation of Islamic Revolution had started to use the system. More information will be given in a separate document submitted by Iran.

UKRAINIAN

Ukraine reported that the system adopted at the 10th UNCSGN continued to be widely used in Ukraine. New draft toponymic guidelines had been prepared with the official romanization. Recently maps depicting territories in Crimea, the Carpathians and the Kiev region had been produced with romanized name forms.

B. Other languages/scripts

ARMENIAN

Armenia reported that the Regulation of the Government of Armenia of 3 March 2011 *On the Rendering of Armenian Geographical Names into English and Russian* was still in force. This regulation contained no exact rules of romanization but the examples given followed a simplified system, containing no additional signs. Following that, there was a draft system worked out by the State Committee of the Real Property Cadastre of the Government of the Republic of Armenia with the agreement of the Armenian Language Institute and the Terminological Committee with input from the UNGEGN WG on Romanization Systems. Its status had not been specified but it may be considered as final draft.

GEORGIAN

Already at the 10th UNCSGN (2012) it was reported that Georgia had returned to the system using apostrophes as it has been presented in the reports of the working group (the national system of Georgia of 2002). In practical applications, however, a simplified system is often in use which omits apostrophes.