Item 11 of the provisional agenda

Activities relating to the Working Group on Romanization Systems

Report of the Working Group on Romanization Systems

Submitted by Working Group on Romanization Systems *

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United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names
29th session, Bangkok, 25–29 April 2016
Agenda item 11

Report of the Working Group on Romanization Systems

Summary

The report covers activities of the working group since the 28th session of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) in 2014. 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 United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (UNCSGN) (2012) 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 28th UNGEGN session on 1 May 2014. The WG considered preparations for the 11th UNCSGN, liaison with ICANN and ISO TC 46/WG 3, updates to the WG's website, and the proposal to create a sub-group to address transcription systems for regions in Africa. Regarding preparations for the next conference attention was turned to systems of romanization that were approved by the UN but never implemented or no longer implemented in full (Amharic, Arabic, Indian group of languages, Khmer and Macedonian Cyrillic). Additionally, five languages/scripts (Armenian, Dzongkha, Kirghiz, Maldivian and Georgian) were identified as having some systems of national romanization in place, thus fostering the prospects of eventually approving these systems for international use. For two languages (Japanese and Korean) there were competing systems in use. Regarding minority languages/scripts, it was acknowledged that if a country would apply for the inclusion of romanization systems for these languages into the UN list of approved systems, this would be welcome (among candidate systems mentioned were those for Inuktitut, Lemko and Tifinagh). As an idea for development, input from experts in the WG would be asked to agree on a mechanism to measure the level of implementation of systems of romanization.

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

2. Website

Version 4.0 of the *Report on the Current Status of United Nations Romanization Systems* was started in February 2013 and by 2014, 20 of the 45 individual sections on languages/scripts had been updated. In February–March 2016, further 25 sections will be updated (Amharic, Arabic, Assamese, Bengali, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Russian, Serbian, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu; Armenian, Kazakh, Kirghiz, Maldivian, Mongolian (Cyrillic), Pashto, Sinhalese and Tajik) thus bringing the publication of version 4.0 into completion. Changes in version 4.0 are mainly of a technical character, e.g. adding references to new submitted documents. The current number of approved UN systems is 30.

3. Other activities. Liaison

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.

Within **ISO**, the International Organization for Standardization, there is a working group 3 "Conversion of written languages" under Technical Committee (TC) 46 "Information and documentation". The aim of the WG is to work out standards related to transliteration. Main users of these standards would be e.g. libraries. In 2014–2015, there have been two meetings of ISO TC 46/WG 3: on 7 May 2014 in Washington and on 3 June 2015 in Beijing. The main achievement of the WG has been the completion of the revision of ISO 7098 "Romanization of Chinese". The draft international standard was approved in 2015 and subsequently published as ISO 7098: 2015 on 15 December 2015.

On the proposal of Thailand and with the approval of TC 46 another project was launched in 2015: studies on WD 20674 "Transliteration of Thai-Tham-Isan and Thai-Noi". These two scripts are or have been used in Thailand. The project team is led by Ms Nitaya Kanchanawan under the auspices of the Committee on Romanization Principles for Tai Languages in Thailand. A working meeting of the project group is planned for 22 April 2016 in Bangkok.

Regarding liaison with **ICANN**, there has been only sporadic correspondence with some of its members. There is a Cross-Community Working Group on Country and Territory Names in ICANN. Some representatives from the Government Advisory Committee of ICANN have inquired with UNGEGN on how to regulate the use of geographical names as top-level domains (TLDs). The Working Group (made up of representatives from a diverse range of stakeholder groups including Government Advisory Committee members) is currently documenting the treatment of geographical names as TLDs as well as on two and three-character codes as TLDs. It was suggested to contact UNGEGN as a group directly and clarify their possible interests[1].

4. Membership

Current members of the WG are Mr Ass'ad S. Abdo (Saudi Arabia), Mr Brahim Atoui (Algeria), Mr Hubert Bergmann (Austria), 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.

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[1] This section updated by Mr Patrick Jones (ICANN).

5. Information on languages/scripts on the agenda of the working group[2]

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

ARABIC

There was a symposium in Constantine, Algeria on February 1–3, 2016 with the title "L'onomastique dans le monde arabe et les pays du Sahel: Politiques de normalisation. Profondeur culturelles". One of the topics of the symposium was romanization but no decisions were taken.

BELARUSIAN

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 all metro stations the signs were posted in Belarusian (Cyrillic and romanized), public maps in the city centre as well printed maps of Belarus and various cities were produced using the official romanization system.

BULGARIAN

Bulgaria reported that the romanization system adopted at the 10th UNCSGN was widely used in Bulgaria. The system was applied in all cartographic products, maps, atlases and gazetteers. The Register of Geographical Names of the Republic of Bulgaria was already an accomplished product. It provides uniformity and sustainability in the usage of names of geographical features. The Register's information system that has been built, is accessible on the webpage of the Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre Agency. This system provides for the registration, actualization and preservation of geographical names and it gives the option to extract and obtain the desired information from the database. One of the attributes of the geographical names listed in the Register is their transliterated form in accordance with the approved romanization system.

KHMER

Cambodia reported that in January 2016 a sub-decree was issued by the Royal Government of Cambodia on mapping and surveying which also had tasks for the harmonization of geographical names, including romanization. There was a plan to work with stakeholders and organize a consultation workshop hopefully this year. In the mean time the so-called provisional system of romanization (1995–1997) continued to be used in actual mapping and everyday communication.

PERSIAN

The Islamic Republic of Iran reported that efforts were under way to connect several services using geographical names to the Iranian Geographical Names Database (IGNDB), a web

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[2] 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), Mr Abolfazl Bolandian (Iran) , Ms Nataliia Kizilova (Ukraine), Mr Artur Avdalyan (Armenia), Ms Shukia Apridonidze (Georgia).

service of Names and Phonetics is being developed for this purpose. The biggest user of the Iranian transcription system was the Iranian Statistics Centre (SCI) that had transcribed 17,000 populated places. The next service to be connected would be the Iranian Post Database, currently the information of Qazvin Province as a pilot project has been linked. The Iranian Committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names has organized training courses for the users of IGNDB, in January 2016 a course was held for the National Geographic Organization (NGO) that intends to switch from transliteration to using the transcription system. Courses are planned to be held every two months.

UKRAINIAN

Ukraine reported that the system adopted at the 10th UNCSGN continued to be widely used in all spheres of life in Ukraine. In 2014–2015 maps with romanized names in various scales were produced for the OSCE, Red Cross and embassies – the maps of Donetsk, Mariupol, Luhansk, regions of Donetsk, Luhansk and Odesa. Maps for general use were also produced – general physical map of Ukraine, maps of Kyiv, Lviv and Odesa.

B. Other languages/scripts

ARMENIAN

Armenia reported that the situation with romanization had not changed. 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. The 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 was still in the draft status.

GEORGIAN

To date, no significant progress can be reported. There have been some articles on romanization issues in scientific journals but no decisions have been taken.