

Ad-Hoc Group of Experts on
the Standardization of
Geographical Names

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ROMANIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES
OF NON-ROMAN-WRITING LANGUAGES

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Experience has proved that the elaboration of a single romanization system for non-Roman-alphabet languages is extremely difficult and even not feasible at present. The proposals to use for this purpose artificial international alphabets or the alphabet of one of the Roman-writing languages neither proved to be acceptable.

As is known a method of rendering foreign geographical names for domestic usage is always chosen by a receiver country. But if a system of rendering names from one script into another is examined with a view to be accepted as an international standard due regard should be devoted to the work done in this field by a donor country, and the system officially adopted in a given country should be chosen as the international standard. It is practically reasonable nowadays for the international collaboration has largely extended and acquired new forms /for example, the publication in some countries of cartographic and other works in foreign languages for international use/. The Geneva Conference also supported this standpoint by the resolutions concerning the Romanization systems for the Thai, Amharic and Persian languages.

We may state that the Soviet Union completely agrees to such a policy concerning foreign place names and follows it in its practical work. Thus, for example, when romanizing Bulgarian place names the Romanization system worked out by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences is always used; the Romanization system for Chinese characters officially adopted by the Chinese People's Republic is used when romanizing Chinese place names.

The countries that have no romanization system yet should work it out in the near future and the United Nations may and should render them necessary technical assistance.

As far as the romanization of geographical names from Russian is concerned, it should be stated that a number of different systems exist, each of them being based on the alphabets and orthography of the corresponding language. They are : the BGN/PCGN system suitable for English, several German systems suitable for German, the system applied by the International Post Union based on the French language, etc...Several systems worked out and employed by different agencies of the Soviet Union may also be pointed out. Finally, the ISO R-9 system recommended by this organization for the international use should be mentioned.

There is no need to analyse the advantages and disadvantages of these systems or to compare them now. The only thing should be stressed : all of them, except the ISO system, are closely connected with the orthography of the corresponding languages.

We should like to say some words only about the Romanization system of the USSR Academy of Sciences. It should be mentioned first of all that some modifications have been proposed for the system. After this modified system has been widely discussed and coordinated among different agencies concerned it will be submitted for the acceptance as the national standard.

This system

(a) is based on the phonemic principle (with due regard to the Russian orthography), though some elements of transcription are included;

(b) uses characters of Roman-writing Slavic languages, monographs mainly;

(c) provides accurate Roman lettering and reading of Russian Names;

(d) is completely independent of the orthography of any Roman-alphabet language, i.e. is a most universal;

(e) provides accurate and unambiguous retransliteration.

We hope that these advantages of the USSR Academy of Sciences system permit us to recommend it as the international standard.

In addition it should be pointed out that this Romanization system (in the version used in the World Atlas, Moscow, 1967) has been employed in some cartographic works issued in other countries, for example, in Grand Atlas International Sequoia, Paris-Bruxelles, 1962 (France) and Bertelsmann Atlas International, Göttersloch, 1963 (FRG).