

UNITED NATIONS

Fifth Session of the Group of Experts
on Geographical Names
5-16 March 1973

ON THE USAGE OF DIACRITICAL MARKS
IN GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES ROMANIZATION

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On the Usage of Diacritical Marks
in Geographical Names Romanization

Diacritical marks are used in almost all kinds of alphabet writing (Roman, Cyrillic, Arabic, Hebrew, Thai, Khmer and others). When analysing the possibility and practicability of the application of diacritics for the romanization of non-Roman alphabets one should be aware that diacritical marks assign additional or specific phonetic value to a number of Roman letters which enriches not only the sound range of a given letter but also the Roman alphabet as a whole widening its phonetic capacity.

The utilization of diacritics in romanization systems for other writings permits

- to represent in romanized forms the lettering and sounding of national names with great adequateness;
- to reconstruct the national lettering when necessary;
- to distinguish between the symbols of a national writing which being romanized without diacritics are represented by a single Roman character (for example, two Arabic symbols ت and ط will confuse in the Roman character "t", two Arabic symbols س and ص will confuse in the Roman "s").

To disregard the potentialities of the diacritics when romanizing geographical names means to purpo-

sely restrict the adequateness of their representation in Roman lettering.

The application of diacritics has been acknowledged advisable by a number of countries which is confirmed by the recently adopted official Romanization systems: "Transliteration of Farsi Geographic Names to Latin Alphabet", 1966, "Arab Countries Romanization" 1972, and others. The BGN - PCGN 1972 "Romanization Guide" uses the diacritics at a large scale as well.

The dropping of diacritics from romanization systems will unwarrantedly vulgarize rather than simplify them and will have an adverse effect on the quality of the material containing geographical names (dictionaries, maps, gazetteers, etc.).

Nevertheless, in particular cases (e.g. in automatic data processing) the usage of type-sets without diacritics (for Roman writing languages) or of an alternate transliteration system with another form of sound representation, for example, with diagraphs (for non-Roman writing languages) can be admitted. But the fields of application of both systems should be carefully specified.