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English only

**Eighth United Nations Conference on the
Standardization of Geographical Names**

Berlin, 27 August-5 September 2002

Item 16 (a) of the provisional agenda*

Writing systems: romanization

**Report of the Working Group on Romanization Systems:
activities from January 1998 to May 2002**

**Submitted by the United Nations Group of Experts on
Geographical Names****

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1. The report covers the period since the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names held in New York in January 1998. The Working Group, as constituted at the 19th Session of UNGEGN held in conjunction with the Seventh Conference, with subsequent changes, is as follows:

Mr. Ass'ad S. Abdo (Saudi Arabia)
Mr. Brahim Atoui (Algeria)
Mrs. Caroline Burgess (United Kingdom)
Mr. Randall E. Flynn (United States)
Mr. Charles M. Heyda (United States)
Mr. Naftali Kadmon (Israel)
Mr. Peeter Päll, Convenor (Estonia)
Mr. Gerd Quinting (United States)
Mr. Alessandro Toniolo (Italy)
Mr. Paul J. Woodman (United Kingdom)

MEETINGS

2. The Working Group had a regular meeting during the twentieth session of UNGEGN in New York (January 2000). In May 2001, following an invitation by the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use, the Working Group met for two days in London. This meeting was particularly fruitful as there was sufficient time to discuss all matters relating to the current status of romanization systems, both those approved by the United Nations and those that are yet under discussion. It was possible to outline a plan of actions regarding individual languages. A full report of the meeting is presented in the Annex. The Working Group is pleased to acknowledge the presence of Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, who attended an associated Reception and was clearly very interested in the work of UNGEGN.

REPORT ON THE UNITED NATIONS ROMANIZATION SYSTEMS FOR GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

3. One of the main results of the activities of the Working Group has been the compilation of a comprehensive document on romanization systems. *"United Nations Romanization Systems for Geographical Names. Preliminary Report on Their Current Status"* was presented to the 20th Session of UNGEGN in January 2000. The aim of the report was to clarify the present status and the degree of implementation of the United Nations romanization systems used for converting geographical names from writing systems other than Roman. The report consisted of two parts. The first part listed languages with non-Roman writing systems and the romanization systems used. The second part presented an overview of romanization systems for each of the languages.

4. Considering remarks and suggestions made by experts on the text of the report during and after the UNGEGN session, version 1.3 was finalized and posted at the Working Group's website. A new updated version is being presented to the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

WEBSITE

5. Since 14 April 2000 the Working Group has a website at <http://www.eki.ee/wgrs/>. It contains the reports of the Working Group to the 20th session of UNGEGN and reports on its meetings and provides some links to other UNGEGN sites and sites devoted to romanization.

LANGUAGES/SCRIPTS COVERED BY SYSTEMS RECOMMENDED BY THE UNITED NATIONS

6. It was noted that in 1999 the Bulgarian Council of Ministers had promulgated a decree regarding personal identity documents with an annex on the romanization of names. This system deviates from that approved by the United Nations in 1977. However, the Bulgarian Council of Orthography and Transcription of Geographical

Names has stated that at the moment there are no plans to submit any new system for the rendering of geographical names.

7. Although there is some evidence of the use of the United Nations romanization system of 1972 for Khmer, in the Gazetteer of Cambodia (1994), for example, there also appears to be in use another, provisional romanization system promulgated by the Geographic Department of the Office of the Council of Ministers (1996). Details of this system are not known.

8. An updated edition of "The Rules for the Transliteration of Geographical Names of the Russian Federation by the Roman Script" has been adopted. This does not, however, change the contents of the romanization table. Examples of implementation of the romanization system include the third edition of the World Atlas (1999) and a dictionary of hydrographical features of Russia and the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (1999).

9. Modifications to the romanization system of Thai approved by the United Nations in 1967 await approval by the next United Nations conference on the standardization of geographical names. The system was received by the Working Group on Romanization Systems already in 1997 and there seem to be no changes made thereafter.

OTHER LANGUAGES/SCRIPTS

10. A new national system of romanization for Byelorussian was approved by the Government Committee on Land Resources, Geodesy and Cartography, Republic of Belarus, on 23 November 2000, modifying an earlier system of 1998. The system is based on GOST 1983, taking into account the peculiarities of the Byelorussian orthography.

11. In September 1991 a phonological romanization for Dzongkha, the national language of Bhutan, was introduced as an official standard by the Chairman of the Dzongkha Development Commission. Roman Dzongkha, as it was called, was not intended to replace traditional Bhutanese writing, but to accurately and adequately represent the phonology of the living language and to serve as a standard for representing Dzongkha names and words in the international media. However, the actual use of the system in Bhutan cannot be verified at present. Existing sources, including Bhutanese media (the *Kuensel* newspaper), seem to continue to use traditional name forms.

12. A new system of romanization was approved in early 2002 for the romanization of Georgian geographical names, replacing a provisional system of 2001. The approved system uses digraphs to denote specific Georgian characters. While the official rules for the romanization are still under discussion in Georgia, further consultations will be needed between the sponsoring country and the UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems.

13. In the Republic of Korea the Ministry of Culture and Tourism promulgated in July 2000 a new official system of romanization for Korean, replacing the previous system of 1984. It is stated that full transition to the new system will be completed before the end of 2005. But since March 2002 it is already compulsory to follow this system in publications. It must be noted that experts at the sessions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names have repeatedly expressed their wish that the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea continue their efforts in reaching an agreement on a single international system for the romanization of Korean geographical names.

OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

14. In Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan there is evidence of actual and quite stable use of new officially approved Roman alphabets for Turkmen and Uzbek. Thus, these languages now fall outside the scope of consideration of the Working Group.

15. As it is necessary to continue discussion on some of the above-mentioned romanization systems once finalized and on newly developed systems for scripts not covered thus far, also to monitor the implementation of the systems, it is recommended that the Eighth Conference extend the mandate of the present Working Group on Romanization Systems.

Annex.

Report on the Meeting of the Working Group in London, 16–17 May 2001.

1. Following an invitation by the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use (PCGN), the UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems held its meeting in London, at the offices of the PCGN on May 16–17, 2001. Participants in the meeting included Mr. Brahim Atoui (Algeria), Mrs. Caroline Burgess (United Kingdom), Mr. Charles M. Heyda (United States), Mr. Naftali Kadmon (Israel), Mrs. Sylvie Lejeune (France), Mr. David Munro (United Kingdom), Mr. Peeter Päll (Estonia), Mr. Gerd Quinting (United States), Mr. Peter E. Raper (South Africa), Mr. Alessandro Toniolo (Italy), Mr. Paul J. Woodman (United Kingdom).

2. The agenda of the meeting included recent developments of various romanization systems; romanization systems in the context of the United Nations; preparations for the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (Berlin, 2002); other activities of the Working Group.

3. While discussing the status of various romanization systems already approved by the United Nations, experts noted that the systems for Chinese, Greek, Hebrew, Macedonian Cyrillic, Mongolian (in China), Persian, Russian, Serbo-Croatian Cyrillic, Tibetan and Uighur were stable and being used by the appropriate national authorities though the degree of implementation in different countries varied greatly and some aspects (e.g. the use of diacritical marks or apostrophes) deserved further attention. Alternative national systems were adopted and occasionally used for Bulgarian and Khmer. It was hoped that the proposed modification of the romanization system for Thai would be put forward at the next UN Conference in 2002, after clarifying some differences in the use of certain character complexes. Working Group members took note of the developments regarding the romanization system for Arabic, notably the planned conference on romanization issues in Algeria in 2002 and the meeting of experts of the Arabic Division planned to take place in the United Arab Emirates in autumn 2001, in accordance with resolution 4 of the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names (New York, 1998). More information was needed on the implementation of the romanization system for Amharic in Ethiopia. As regards the romanization systems for the languages of the Indian group (Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu), it was stated that, as these systems had not been implemented, it was necessary to contact the national names authorities of the countries of that division in order to obtain their views on the necessity of revising previous United Nations resolutions concerning the adoption of the aforementioned systems.

4. Turning to the languages and scripts that are not yet covered by romanization systems recommended by the United Nations, members of the Working Group noted that while there existed national romanization systems for Byelorussian, Dzongkha, Laotian, and Maldivian, none of the systems had been presented to the Working Group and subsequently to UNGEGN sessions or United Nations conferences on the standardization of geographical names. National authorities of these countries needed to be contacted in order to encourage them to put forward their national systems for consideration by experts on geographical names. Experts noted that although the romanization system for Ukrainian had been discussed at previous UNGEGN sessions, there was no new information available since 1997 and the Roman-letter equivalents of certain Ukrainian characters still needed clarification. Working Group members took note of the new official system of romanization for Korean promulgated by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Republic of Korea, in July 2000. The Working Group was mindful of the efforts by experts from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea started in 1989 seeking to agree on a single international system for the romanization of Korean geographical names. Information to clarify the actually utilized script and/or possible romanization systems for Armenian,

Georgian, Kazakh and Tigrinya was obtained. No new information was received on the status of the romanization systems for Burmese, Japanese, Kirghiz, Mongolian (Cyrillic), Pashto, Sinhalese and Tajik.

5. Working Group members noted that there was evidence of the actual and quite stable use of new official Roman alphabets for Turkmen and Uzbek. Thus, these languages now fall outside the scope of consideration of the Working Group. In order to facilitate the use of earlier name sources, however, it was agreed to include the tables of correspondences between Cyrillic and Roman characters for Azerbaijani, Turkmen and Uzbek in the report of the Working Group to the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

6. Discussing the difficulties faced by the United Nations departments and services in using geographical names, especially diacritical marks accompanying the letters and characters in some names, it was noted that there already existed technical solutions to solve the problems with diacritical marks. The UNGEGN Working Group on Toponymic Data Files and Gazetteers does address these issues. The resolutions of the United Nations conferences on the standardization of geographical names supported the use of diacritics in names since they are integral parts of the spellings of names.

7. Working Group members also discussed preparations for the Eighth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. This involved the contents and format of the report on the current status of United Nations romanization systems for geographical names and conceptions for the romanization sub-topic at the planned Technical Exhibition. Development of the Working Group website was also briefly discussed.

8. During the two-day meeting the Working Group was able to discuss a wide range of topics, accomplishing a great deal of work thanks to the dedicated efforts of each participant of the meeting and to the excellent organizational support by the PCGN, the host of the meeting. Altogether, these meetings are most beneficial and will continue to be in the future.