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### **Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names**

New York, 31 July – 9 August 2012

Item 13(a) of the provisional agenda

**Writing systems and pronunciation:**

**Romanization**

Report of the Working Group on Romanization Systems:  
Current status of UN romanization systems for geographical names

Submitted by the Working Group on Romanization Systems \*\*

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\* E/CONF.101/1.

\*\* Prepared by Peeter Päll, Convenor of the Working Group

**Report of the Working Group on Romanization Systems:  
Current status of UN romanization systems for geographical names<sup>1</sup>**

The UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems monitors the status of romanization systems on its agenda; this includes both those that have been approved by the United Nations, and those that are still being discussed. The following is a list of major developments since the Ninth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 2007. Full details of romanization systems are available on the WG's website at <http://www.eki.ee/wgrs>.

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

**ARABIC**

On May 26–29, 2010 the 5th Arab Conference on Geographical Names was held in Beirut, Lebanon. One of the main items discussed was the unified system for the romanization of Arabic (2007). It was recommended that all Arabic Division member countries continue to implement this system and the League of Arab States seek the official approval of the state members on the implementation of the system through its appropriate institutions. The next meeting of the Arabic Division is scheduled to take place in Amman, Jordan, in July 2012.

**BULGARIAN**

Bulgaria submitted a document (E/CONF.98/CRP.71) to the 9th UNCSGN presenting the new romanization system, officially valid in Bulgaria since 26 October 2006 for writing geographical names. There is also a Law on Transliteration adopted by the Bulgarian Parliament on 27 February 2009 which indicates that the system is recommended for universal use in rendering Bulgarian names and words into Roman script. Effectively, this system renders obsolete the UNCSGN resolution III/10 (1977) which is based on the former official table. The new system is also applied in cartographic products as illustrated in the 2007 *Administrative Atlas: Republic of Bulgaria*. It is expected that the new system will be put forward for approval at the 10th UNCSGN.

**KHMER**

The current UN-approved system is not used in Cambodia. In a reply by Mr. So Vanna, Director, Geography Department of Cambodia (April 2012), it was acknowledged that the romanization system used in Cambodia needed to be recognised and adopted by the government. The Ministry of Land Management, Urban Planning and Construction would have to make a decision.

**MACEDONIAN CYRILLIC**

The attention of the Working Group has been drawn to a publication on the language's orthography, *Правопис на македонскиот литературен јазик* (Skopje 1998) where a system of romanization was presented which is different from the UN-approved one. This raises the question whether the UN-approved system is applied in The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia at present; more research is needed.

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<sup>1</sup> Prepared by Peeter Päll, Convenor of the Working Group.

## NEPALI

The current UN-approved system has never been implemented in Nepal, but there is a system of romanization applied by the Nepal Survey Department (NSD), especially in its Geographic Information Infrastructure Programme (available online at <http://www.ngiip.gov.np/geographical.php>). The WG's contact in NSD has informed that there are still different romanization systems in use, and more work is needed to arrive at a single system.

## PERSIAN

The Islamic Republic of Iran presented in 2004 and 2006 at UNGEGN sessions a broad transcription system for rendering geographical names. In December 2011 the Working Group received a proposal by Iran with possible modifications to the romanization system. Subsequent discussions between the WG and the Iranian National Committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names (particularly its Transcription Working Group) concerned certain romanization equivalents, the questions of reversibility of the new system and its implementation. As a result of these discussions, Iran presented in May 2012 a modified version of the broad transcription system, with the aim of submitting it for approval at the 10th UNCSGN.

### ***B. Other languages/scripts***

## ARMENIAN

On 3 March 2011 the Government of Armenia adopted a regulation on the rendering of Armenian names into Russian and English. Following correspondence with the Armenian State Committee of the Real Property Cadastre, in November 2011 Armenia presented its first romanization draft to the Working Group. This was worked out with the agreement of the Armenian Language Institute and the Terminological Committee. There is an ongoing discussion between the WG and Armenian experts regarding some details of the system.

## BELARUSIAN

Belarus presented its national system of romanization in 2007 at the 9th UNCSGN. Based on traditional Roman alphabet (*lacinka*), it was modified and adopted in its present form on 11 June, 2007 by the State Committee of the Property of the Republic of Belarus. The system continues to be used in Belarus when publishing maps or gazetteers. It is expected that the system will be submitted to the 10th UNCSGN for approval.

## GEORGIAN

It was reported earlier that the national system of romanization (2002) remained in use in certain fields and at the 26th session of UNGEGN in 2011 Georgia confirmed that the decree of the President of Georgia No. 109, 24 February 2011 had approved this system. However, information in April 2012 suggested that there were still objections to the use of the apostrophe in the system, and therefore another provisional system had been compiled for use in the national corpus of geographical names of Georgia.

## KAZAKH

In Kazakhstan, a *de facto* standard is appearing to gain ground in romanizing Kazakh names. The Kazakh News Agency introduced in 2004 a system of romanization, to assist Kazakhs living abroad, to read the news (see <http://www.inform.kz/indexqaz.html>). Also the Kazakhstan government website (<http://qz.government.kz/>) is using the same system. It is based on the version of Roman (Turkish) alphabet proposed by A. Khaydari.

## MALDIVIAN

In November 2008 the Ministry of Planning and National Development published an Official Atlas of the Maldives with details of slight revisions to the official romanization system of 1987. The index contains names both in the altered romanization and the original script. Attempts by the WG to contact the Maldivian authorities in geographical names have largely proved unsuccessful.

## UKRAINIAN

On January 27, 2010 the Ukrainian Government adopted new rules for the romanization of Ukrainian. The rules will apply both to personal names and geographical names. The system is based on the previous system of 1996 with three differences: 1) character 30 (ш) is rendered **shch** (not **sch**); 2) characters 33 (ь) and 34 (') are not romanized. In a letter to the convenor of the WG, Mr. Volodymyr Kulinich, Head of the State Service of Geodesy, Cartography and Cadastre restated the aim of Ukraine to submit this system for approval at the 10th UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

## **Summary**

The report outlines the main developments in the status of various romanization systems on the agenda of the UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems. Information is provided on the romanization systems of Arabic, Bulgarian, Khmer, Macedonian Cyrillic, Nepali, Persian; Armenian, Belarusian, Georgian, Maldivian and Ukrainian. Systems likely to be presented for approval at the 10th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names include Belarusian, Bulgarian, Persian and Ukrainian. A new romanization system is being developed for Armenian. Discussions are still ongoing regarding the romanization of Arabic, Georgian and Nepali.