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Writing systems and pronunciation: Romanization

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

Submitted by Working Group on Romanization Systems **

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** 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 names¹

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, Belarusian, Bulgarian, Hebrew, Khmer, Macedonian Cyrillic, Persian, Ukrainian; Armenian, Georgian, Kazakh, Lao and Sinhala. It is expected that the unified Arabic romanization system (2007) will be submitted to the 11th United Nations Conference for approval. Latest new developments have been reported concerning Lao and Sinhala.

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The UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems (WGRS) 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 Tenth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 2012². 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 9–11 May 2017 a meeting of the Arabic Division of Experts on Geographical Names (ADEGN) took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, organized by the National Committee on Geographical Names in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at King Abdulaziz Foundation for Research and Archives. The main topic of the meeting was romanization of Arabic. Participants signed the “Riyadh Declaration on the Arab Stand on the unified Arabic romanization system” in which they confirmed that they have reviewed the system of romanization and have agreed to submit this declaration to the 11th UNCGSN. In conjunction with the divisional meeting a technical meeting was organized on 10 May with participation

¹ Prepared by Peeter Päll, Convenor of the Working Group.

² Updates (2017) to the previously reported information (2014, 2016) was provided, *inter alia*, by Ms Irina Borodich (Belarus), Ms Gloria Djadjeva (Bulgaria), Mr Chharom Chin (Cambodia), Ms Nataliia Kizilova (Ukraine), Mr Artur Avdalyan (Armenia), Ms Shukia Apridonidze (Georgia), Ms Noun Phommixay (Lao P. D. R.), Mr D. N. D. Hettiarachchi (Sri Lanka).

from UNGEGN Chair William H. Watt and UNGEGN WGRS Convenor Peeter Päll in order to look in detail into the recommendations of WGRS adopted at its Prague meeting in April 2017. Participants of the technical meeting discussed and agreed on certain clarifications and amendments in the unified Arabic romanization system that will be forwarded to Arabic Division and WGRS members for comments. Provided there is an agreement, the unified Arabic romanization system will be submitted to the 11th UNCSGN for approval.

BELARUSIAN

The State Committee of the Property of the Republic of Belarus reported that when compiling cartographic or other products for international use, the national romanization of Belarusian (adopted also by the 10th UNCSGN) continued to be used. As an example of its implementation, for the world championship in ice hockey (2014) new signs had been posted on streets and metro stations using the official romanization system. Romanized names were displayed together with names in Belarusian on signs at roads, streets of larger cities and metro stations in Minsk.

BULGARIAN

Bulgaria reported that the romanization system adopted at the 10th UNCSGN continued to be 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.

HEBREW

It was reported at the Prague meeting of WGRS (April 2017) that the UN system had been amended in 2007 (resolution IX/9) on the basis of a decision by the Academy of the Hebrew Language taken in November, 2006. However, there was no evidence of the amended system being implemented in Israel.

KHMER

Cambodia reported in 2017 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 in 2017. In the mean time the so-called provisional system of romanization (1995–1997) continued to be used in actual mapping and everyday communication.

MACEDONIAN CYRILLIC

It was reported at the WGRS meeting in Prague (April 2017) that the currency and implementation of the UN-approved system was in doubt and more information was required.

PERSIAN

The Islamic Republic of Iran reported in 2014 and 2016 that the Vice-Presidency of Strategic Planning and Supervision to the governmental sector had issued an order for the implementation of the official romanization system, adopted at the 10th UNCSGN. Among others, the Statistical Centre of Iran (SCI) and the Housing Foundation of Islamic Revolution had started to use the system. Efforts were under way in 2016 to connect several services using geographical names to the Iranian Geographical Names Database (IGNDB), a web service of Names and Phonetics was being developed for this purpose. The biggest user of the Iranian transcription system was SCI that had transcribed 17,000 populated places. The next service to be connected would be the Iranian Post Database, in 2016 the information of Qazvin Province as a pilot project had been linked. The Iranian Committee on the Standardization of Geographical Names had organized training courses for the users of IGNDB, in January 2016 a course was held for the National Geographic Organization (NGO) that intended to switch from transliteration to using the transcription system. Courses were planned to be held every two months.

UKRAINIAN

Ukraine reported in 2017 that the system adopted at the 10th UNCSGN continued to be widely used in all spheres of life in Ukraine. In 2014–2016 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, Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kirovohrad, Kharkiv, Luhansk, Mykolaiv, Poltava, Sumy and Odesa. Maps for general use were also produced – general physical and administrative maps of Ukraine, the city maps of Kyiv, Lviv and Odesa.

B. Other languages/scripts

ARMENIAN

Armenia reported in 2017 that 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. This regulation contained no exact rules of romanization but the examples given followed a simplified system, containing no additional signs. There was also a 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 UNGEGN WGRS. It remained in the draft status for the time being.

GEORGIAN

Georgia reported in 2017 that no major changes had occurred during the last five years. The status of the national system of romanization (2002) remained unclear as it had not been

implemented. In practical applications a simplified system was often in use which omits apostrophes.

KAZAKH

At the meeting of WGRS in Bangkok (April 2016) Kazakh experts confirmed that the transition of Kazakh from Cyrillic script to Roman script should be completed by 2025.

LAO

At the 29th Session of UNGEGN in Bangkok (2016) contacts were established with the representative of the National Geographic Department, Lao P. D. R. The draft Instruction on Toponymy 2013, worked out by the National Geographic Information (GIS) Committee for use in maps, contains also romanization guidelines. In cooperation with Lao experts, WGRS has been preparing the English translation of the guidelines. Currently the draft Instruction is waiting for approval by the Ministry of Justice.

SINHALA

Sri Lanka reported in 2017 that the Committee for the Standardization of Geographical Names had prepared a draft system of romanization for Sinhala, one of the two national languages in Sri Lanka. The draft was based on ISO 15919. More information is given in a separate document submitted to the 11th UNCISG. WGRS has provided initial comments to the draft.