

**Twenty-seventh session
30 July and 10 August 2012, New York**

Item 3 of the Provisional Agenda

Reports of the Working Groups

Report of the Working Group on Romanization Systems *

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Report of the Working Group on Romanization Systems¹

SCOPE OF WORK

1. The UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems was established in 1970 during the 2nd session of UNGEGN in New York, originally it was called the working group on a single romanization system. Its basic mandate is to consider and reach agreement on an international romanization system for geographical names proposed by a donor country. This process includes consultations between the donor country and the WG on all technical matters regarding the proposed system, consideration of the system's degree of reversibility and the extent of its implementation. The systems are approved in the form of a resolution at the UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

2. The most pertinent resolutions of the UN conferences are I/9 (A single romanization system), IV/15 (Guidelines for the consideration of romanization systems) and IX/8 (Implementation of romanization systems by sponsoring countries).

MEETINGS

3. Since the Ninth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 2007 there have been three working group meetings, two of them have been held in conjunction with UNGEGN sessions.

4. On **26 May 2009** an informal meeting was held in Nairobi, at the 25th session of UNGEGN. WG members considered the status of various romanization systems (among others, Arabic, Persian), especially with regard to their reversibility and usability in Unicode-compatible applications.

5. On **5 May 2011** another informal meeting was held in Vienna, at the 26th session of UNGEGN. WG members considered the romanization systems for Arabic, Georgian, Persian and Ukrainian. Some of these were likely to come up at the 10th UNCSGN for adoption. There was also a discussion on cooperation with ICANN, and on the Unicode Transliteration Guidelines.

6. Reports of both meetings are published on the WG's website.

7. On **18 May 2012** a full meeting of the WG took place in Gdańsk, Poland, in conjunction with the meeting of the UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms, hosted by the Polish Head Office of Geodesy and Cartography. The main purpose of the meeting was to prepare for the 10th UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. The WG discussed the systems that were likely to come up at the Conference for adoption. There were no

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objections to the proposed systems of romanization for Belarusian² and Persian, in the latter case it was recommended to make the geographical names of Iran also available in transliteration, as the proposed system is not fully reversible. Also the importance of implementation was stressed. Concerning the romanization systems for Bulgarian and Ukrainian, there were differing opinions on the priority of criteria, required for the adoption of romanization systems, particularly on the importance of reversibility and of the system's implementation in national cartographic products. The WG will discuss further these systems during an informal meeting in New York. The WG also noted information on Arabic, Armenian and Georgian, and briefly considered the question of liaison with ICANN and ISO.

WEBSITE

8. The working group continues to maintain a website at www.eki.ee/wgrs which gives details on all romanization systems adopted by the United Nations conferences, and those still on its agenda. One of the main results of the activities of the WG has been the compilation and updating of a comprehensive *Report on the Current Status of United Nations Romanization Systems for Geographical Names*. Since the Ninth UN Conference the following sections have been updated:

- Bulgarian (the new official system of 2006 was added, likely to be submitted for approval in 2012);
- Hebrew (contains the revised version of romanization approved by the UN in 2007);
- Macedonian Cyrillic (an alternative system used in language manuals was added);
- Nepali (Nepal Survey Department system was added for cross-reference);
- Belarusian (the national system of romanization was updated to the 2007 version);
- Georgian (reflects the fact that the BGN/PCGN 1981 system was retired in 2009 in favour of the Georgian national system of 2002);
- Tigrinya (includes the BGN/PCGN system approved in 2007);
- Ukrainian (contains the updated national system approved in 2010).

9. The list of WG documents on the website was updated to include all major documents submitted to UNGEGN sessions or UN conferences since the formation of the WG in 1970. This became possible thanks to the copies of documents on the UNGEGN website.

INDIVIDUAL ROMANIZATION SYSTEMS

10. For details see the report of the WG to the Tenth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

COOPERATION

11. There has been an ongoing collaboration of the WG with other UNGEGN working groups and projects, regarding the use of romanized names in documents: the UNGEGN Database, the list of country names maintained by the Working Group on Country Names, etc.

² At the meeting it was decided to update the spelling of the language name, from Byelorussian to Belarusian. However, the final form of the name will be determined in consultation with the other UNGEGN working groups and the geographical names authorities of Belarus.

12. In 2009, liaison was established with ICANN, the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers in order to find experts when applying for the non-Roman-script country-code Internationalized Domain Names (for more information, see a liaison report to the 27th session of UNGEGN).

13. Also, a note has been taken of the Unicode Transliteration Guidelines which have a huge potential in being used for automatic script conversion in several widely known applications. The UN-approved systems are included as one of the methods of conversion and during the UNGEGN session in Vienna, 2011, there was a useful discussion with Unicode Consortium experts. The WG was encouraged to let the Unicode Technical Committee know of any newly-approved systems or changes to existing systems.

14. Quite recently, in 2011–2012 there have been proposals for a closer cooperation with an ISO expert body charged with a similar function: ISO TC 46/WG 3 – conversion of written languages. WG3 had become defunct and as a consequence the standards it managed had not been adequately maintained. However, at its Annual Meeting in Berlin in May 2012, TC46 had reinstated WG3 and noted that the Convenor of the UNGEGN WG on Romanization Systems would be an important contact.

MEMBERSHIP

15. Since the Ninth UN Conference several new members have joined the WG and the current list is as follows: Mr. Ass'ad S. Abdo (Saudi Arabia), Mr. Brahim Atoui (Algeria), Mr. Hubert Bergmann (Austria), Mr. Jesse J. Bisogni (United States), Mr. Abolfazl Bolandian (Islamic Republic of Iran), Mrs. Caroline Burgess (United Kingdom), Mme. Élisabeth Calvarin (France), Mr. Jeffrey M. Carnes (United States), Ms. Catherine Cheetham (United Kingdom), Mr. Randall E. Flynn (United States), Mr. Benjamin D. Foster (United States), Mr. David A. Gunn (United States), Mr. Peter Jordan (Austria), Mr. Naftali Kadmon (Israel), Mr. Gholamreza Karimzadeh (Islamic Republic of Iran), Ms. Becki Maddock (United Kingdom), Mr. Mehran Maghsoudi (Islamic Republic of Iran), Mr. Peeter Päll (convenor, Estonia), Mr. Trent C. Palmer (United States), Mr. Walter Petrovitz (Holy See), Mr. Tjeerd Tichelaar (Netherlands), Mr. Alessandro Toniolo (Italy), Mr. Paul J. Woodman (United Kingdom), Mr. Bogusław R. Zagórski (Poland). Some of WG members have retired from active service but continue to be associated with the working group.

ACTION PLAN

16. It is hoped that several of the proposed romanization systems will be approved by the 10th UNCSGN. Following that, the WG will need to monitor the implementation of these systems and to continue contacting names authorities in countries for which there are as yet no UN-approved systems of romanization. Particular attention should also be turned, according to Res. IX/8, to romanization systems that have never been implemented (Indian group of languages), or are not any more implemented in the donor countries (e.g., Cambodia, Ethiopia). Therefore, it is recommended that the mandate of the Working Group on Romanization Systems be extended.