Item 3 of the Provisional Agenda*

Reports of the working groups

Report of the Working Group on Romanization Systems

Submitted by the Working Group on Romanization Systems**

Report of the Working Group on Romanization Systems[1]

SCOPE OF WORK

1. The UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems (WGRS) 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 Tenth UN Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names in 2012 there have been three working group meetings, two of them have been held in conjunction with UNGEGN sessions.

4. On **1 May 2014** an informal meeting was held in New York, at the 28th session of UNGEGN. WG members considered the status of various romanization systems (among others, Arabic). They also addressed the question of romanization systems for regional and minority languages agreeing that if a country wishes to submit romanization systems for such languages, they will be included on the agenda of the WG. WGRS also noted the proposal to establish a sub-group for transcription of (unwritten) indigenous languages in West and Central Africa.

5. On **29 April 2016** another informal meeting was held in Bangkok, at the 29th session of UNGEGN. WG members discussed the status of romanization systems for Arabic, Khmer, Lao and Sinhala, and were informed of the transition of Kazakh to Roman script. Participants also learned of ongoing work in Thailand to address the romanization of a number of scripts used for minority or historical languages in Thailand. WGRS noted efforts on the formation of a working group to assist in the development of transcription systems for unwritten languages in Africa. It was also noted that publicizing the benefits of romanization could be a useful task for the WG, and the WG agreed that widening public understanding of the purpose of romanization would be beneficial to the work of the group and to the users of geographical names.

6. On **7 April 2017** a full meeting of the WG took place in Prague (Praha), Czechia, in conjunction with the meeting of the UNGEGN Working Group on Exonyms, hosted by the Czech Geodetical and Land Survey Office. The main purpose of the meeting was to prepare for the 11th UN Conference on

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

the Standardization of Geographical Names. The WG had an introductory presentation on the topic "Romanization in a changing world" (Paul Woodman) and discussed the status of various romanization systems. Particular attention was paid to the romanization of Arabic that was going to be on the agenda of the forthcoming meeting of the Arabic Division in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (9–11 May 2017). Participants of the Prague meeting agreed on comments to the proposed Arabic romanization system that were forwarded to the Arabic Division. WG members also discussed possibilities to clarify the notion of implementation (of a romanization system) and the ways to measure it.

7. Reports on all meetings are published on WG's website.

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 Tenth UN Conference all the systems have been updated and consolidated into version 4.0 (updates were prepared since March 2013 and completed in March 2016). Major changes in the individual sections include:

- Belarusian (introduction of the system approved by the UN in 2012);
- Bulgarian (introduction of the system approved by the UN in 2012);
- Persian (introduction of the system approved by the UN in 2012);
- Ukrainian (introduction of the system approved by the UN in 2012);
- Kazakh (a de facto romanization system by QazAqparat in 2004 was included);
- Maldivian (updates of the national system in 2009 were included).

9. The list of WG documents on the website has been 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 Eleventh 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.

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 the period 2012–2017 no new contacts can be reported.

13. WGRS has established contacts with ISO TC 46/WG 3 – conversion of written languages; several WGRS members are also members of the ISO WG. Two meetings of ISO TC 46/WG 3 have taken place during the last five years: one in Washington (7 May 2014) and the other in Beijing (3 June 2015). The WG has been involved in two projects. The updating of ISO 7098 "Romanization of

Chinese" was completed and published as ISO 7098:2015 on 15 December 2015. On the proposal of Thailand another project named "Transliteration of Thai-Tham-Isan and Thai-Noi" was launched in 2015. Following some discussions the title of the project was changed in September 2016 and it is now ISO/WD 20674-1 "Transliteration of scripts in use in Thailand; Part 1: Transliteration of Akson-Thai-Noi". The text was approved as DIS (draft international standard) in May 2017. The project is the responsibility of the Committee on Romanization Principles for Tai Languages in Thailand.

MEMBERSHIP

14. Since the Tenth 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. 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. Sungjae Choo (Republic of Korea), Ms. Allison Dollimore (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), Mr. Christos Kastrisios (Greece), Mr. Liu Lianan (China), 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. Gerhard Rampl (Austria), Mr. Alexandros Stavropoulos (Greece), 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

15. It is expected that an updated romanization system for Arabic would be submitted for approval by the 11th UNCSGN. The WG will need to continue monitoring the implementation of UN-approved systems and continue contacting names authorities in countries for which there are as yet no UN-approved systems of romanization. Latest contacts with the Lao P. D. R. and Sri Lanka look promising. 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.