Minutes of the technical meeting on the romanization of Arabic

Ar Riyaḏ (Riyadh), 10 May 2017

In conjunction with the Meeting of the Arabic Division of Experts on Geographical Names (ADEGN) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 9–11 May 2017, a technical meeting was organized on 10 May in order to look in detail into the recommendations of the UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems (WGRS) adopted at its Prague meeting on 7 April 2017. The recommendations concerned the system of romanization of Arabic, adopted at the Third Arabic Conference in 2007 in Beirut (ADEGN 2007 System).

Present at the technical meeting were Dr. Awni Moh'd al-Khasawneh (Chair of the Arabic Division, Jordan), Mr. Maroun Khraish (Lebanon), Dr. Abdullah Alwelaie (Saudi Arabia), Mr. William H. Watt (Chair of UNGEGN, Australia) and Dr. Peeter Päll (Convenor of the UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems, Estonia).

Participants of the meeting discussed the points as raised by WGRS in the same order as they were presented.

1. The use of standard Arabic in names. All participants agreed that, as a rule, Arabic names should be standardized and romanized according to the rules of the standard literary language (*al fuṣḥá*) omitting elements coming from the local dialects.

2. The recommendation to reconsider the romanization of ظ as ***dh***. Representatives of the Arabic Division rejected this recommendation on the ground that *dh* had already been widely implemented in countries that have adopted the ADEGN 2007 system and, scientifically, ظ can also be interpreted as an emphatic variant of ذ *dh*. However, from a pragmatic point of view – the ease of use of the romanization and the availability of special characters in widely used applications – the experts agreed to consult with their technical advisors on whether the actual encoding in Unicode of the romanization equivalent would be ***dh*** (in Unicode: U+0064 [d], U+035F [double macron below], U+0068 [h]) or ***ḏh*** (in Unicode: U+1E0F [ḏ], U+0068 [h]). The latter would simplify the use of the romanization system with no significant detriment to reversibility, as character combinations are also used elsewhere in the system (*dh, gh, kh, sh, th*) and there is the option of disambiguation (see point 5).

3. The recommendation to amend the romanization of *alif maqṣūrah*. All participants agreed that the romanization equivalent as currently proposed in the ADEGN 2007 system, may cause confusion and is not practical to use in applications. Therefore, it should be clarified that the recommended romanization of *alif maqṣūrah* is ***á*** (a with acute).

4. The recommendation on the capitalization of articles and the use of hyphens. Representatives of the Arabic Division rejected this recommendation as the current ADEGN 2007 system has already been widely implemented and using capital initial letters for articles in names would signify that these constitute part of names. It would also be more simple to use always capital initials irrespective of the article's position in a name.

5. The advice against the use of a slash / to disambiguate some character combinations from those representing single Arabic characters. Participants agreed that as the slash had become an established marker to distinguish alternative name variants, it should not be used within a name. If there is a need to distinguish Arabic character combinations (like ده, سه) from single Arabic characters (like ذ, ش) in romanization, a middle dot (·) could be used.

6. The recommendation to state as a rule the romanization of adjectival endings as *-iyyah*. Participants agreed that this could be accepted.

7. Provision of further comments on the wording and terms in the document on the romanization rules for Arabic was noted. It was also noted that as the current document on romanization was prepared by a special sub-committee of the Arabic Division, all new editions of the document should go through the same sub-committee.

Participants of the meeting agreed that the current minutes will be sent to Arabic Division members and members of the UNGEGN Working Group on Romanization Systems for comments, and provided there is an agreement, a draft resolution with a reference to the original document on romanization and the agreed amendments would be put forward by the Arabic Division to the 11th United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names for approval.

Notes taken by Peeter Päll