

Minutes of the technical meeting on the romanization of Arabic

Ar Riyāḍ (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), Gen. Maroun Khraish (Commissar of ADEGN, Lebanon), Dr. Abdullah Alwelaie (Vice President of the Committee on Geographical Names, 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 fuṣḥā*) omitting elements coming from the local dialects. Local standardization should be done in each country member of the Arabic Division according to UNCDSGN resolution I/4.

2. The recommendation to reconsider the romanization of **ḍ** as **dh**. Representatives of the Arabic Division declined this recommendation on the ground that **dh** had already been widely implemented in countries that have adopted the ADEGN 2007 system and, scientifically, **ḍ** can also be interpreted as an emphatic variant of **ḏ 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 **dh** (in Unicode: U+1E0F [d̥], 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).¹

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).

¹ According to later addition by Gen. Maroun Khraish the **dh** option will be preferred because it is more logical and does not cause ambiguity.

4. The recommendation on the capitalization of articles and the use of hyphens. Representatives of the Arabic Division declined this recommendation as the current ADEGN 2007 system has already been widely implemented and using capital initial letters for articles in all words of composite 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. No hyphens should be used between articles and words in names as is habitual in other languages as well (*la lune, the moon*).

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 ش, ذ) 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 is accepted and noted that it is already covered in current rules 9 (c) and 10 (a).

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.

Gen. Maroun Khraish stated that the unified Arabic romanization system known as Beirut 2007 complied with the UNGEGN resolution No. 4/VII that urged the League of Arab States to gather the experts of the Arab states to agree on a unified romanization system for the standardization of their place names. For that the 3rd Arab Conference on Geographical Names (ACGN) was held in Beirut. 16 Arab states were represented. A technical team from the League of Arab States (LAS) participated in all discussions. Vice Secretary General of LAS, His Excellency the Ambassador Abd Ar Ruhman As Sulh attended all the sessions and approved by his signature the “Unified Arabic transliteration system” known as 2007 Beirut system.

Participants of the technical 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 with additions from Gen. Maroun Khraish.