

RULES OF TRANSLITERATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURE NAMES

Transliteration is a literal conversion of a word or text from a script into another. Upon such, a unit of one writing system (script) is replaced by the relevant unit (or combination of letters) from the other.

Difficulties arising upon converting proper names, geographical names, and toponyms in our mother tongue into foreign languages are occasioned by the characteristic transliteration of specifically letters *ə, ö, ü, ğ, ç,* and *x*.

For the absence of unified transliteration (conversion) table and standards, a use and wide spread of words in different versions are being encountered. As years pass, writings of words that have been subject to deformation started to become acceptable in various forms. For instance, upon Azerbaijan's regaining its independence, words (names, toponyms, *etc.*) written according to the transliteration standards adopted in the Soviet Union are written in another form (*e.g.*, last name *Qurbanov – Kurbanov – Gurbanov*).

Instructive Order of 9 April 2013 of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan approves the *State Program for Contemporary Use of Azerbaijani Language in Globalization Environment and Development of Linguistics in Country*. Sub-Section 6.1.4 of the Program covers issues of preparing the National Transliteration Standards.

A step taken in this direction is the *Rules of Transliteration of Names of Geographical Features of Republic of Azerbaijan from Azerbaijani Alphabet into Russian and English Alphabets* approved by Resolution No 498, dated 16 December 2020, of the Cabinet of Ministers. The Rules establish methods and terms of transliterating into the Russian and English scripts of the names of geographical features of the Republic of Azerbaijan upon publication of cartographic and other printing materials. All governmental agencies as well as entities regardless of their ownership and organisational-legal form and individuals must comply with the requirements of the Rules.

Transliteration of the names of geographical features is done by transliterating the letters (symbols) in the Azerbaijani language script into the equivalent relevant letters in the Russian script. In this case, the written form of a word is preserved considering accurateness of pronunciation.

Under the Cabinet of Ministers Resolution, the Rules are separately promulgated as Schedules 1 and 2 based on the Russian and English languages, respectively.

Generally, a detailed regulation of each of transliteration of vowels and consonants, including combination of letters, and their writing upon use in the beginning and middle of a word upon transliterating into the Russian and English languages alike is included in the Rules. Upon reviewing the details, some of them may look familiar to us while there are also novelties. Just as transliteration (both in the Russian and English languages) in varying forms of vowels and consonants in the beginning and middle of a word can be considered a novelty.

Under the Rules, the key objective of transliterating from the Latin script Azerbaijani alphabet into the Cyrillic script Russian alphabet is to transpose onomastic units (special names) into the Russian language in the version closest to the original. In this case, the following must be considered:

- phonetic specifications of the Azerbaijani and Russian languages, including presence of specific graphemes (letters) in the Latin script modern Azerbaijani alphabet and Cyrillic script Russian alphabet;
- continuity of generally accepted and stable tradition upon transliterating a number of geographical feature names; and
- syllabic features of words, position of letters in words, order of morphemes (root, suffix, and prefix), and internal structure, specific features of combinations of letters.

Upon transliterating from the Azerbaijani into the Russian of some geographical names, traditionally, their generally accepted and stable equivalents in the Russian are rendered. For example, Caspian Sea (*Xəzər Dənizi*) – *Каспийское Море*, Kura River (*Kür Çayı*) – *река Кюра*, etc.; while *Abşeron* upon transliteration is rendered *Абшерон*, traditionally, in the Russian is delivered as *Апшерон*. Under the Rules, here, the prevalence is given to both a historical tradition and phonetic principle.

Similarly, while the Rules provide for transliteration of vowel *ı* into the English *i*, upon transliteration of the word *Bakı* into the English language, transliteration of letter *ı* into *u* is based on a tradition: *Bakı* – Baku.

Generally, one of distinct features of the Rules is transliteration of the letters (symbols) in the Azerbaijani language into the relevant equivalent letters of the English alphabet and, upon such, preservation of a written form of a word without considering accurateness of its pronunciation. As noted above, accurateness of pronunciation of a word is considered in the Russian language writing form of a word.

Creation of electronic database reflecting writings based on the National Transliteration Standards in various languages of geographical names related to Azerbaijan is, under Instructive Order No 64s, dated 20 February 2020, of the Cabinet of Ministers, assigned to the National Academy of Sciences along with other relevant agencies.

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