# The Impact of Script Reform on Names across Cultures. Lessons for Kazakhstan's 2031 Latinization

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**Abstract**
This article explores the Cyrillic-to-Latin script reform in Kazakhstan through a comparative analysis of similar reforms in Turkic, Slavic, and Romance-speaking countries. With a focus on the treatment of proper names – anthroponyms and toponyms – it examines the political, phonological, technological, and cultural implications of script transition. Drawing on case studies from Turkey, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Romania, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the article demonstrates that alphabet reform is not merely a technical shift but a sociolinguistic process embedded in identity politics and institutional practice. Special emphasis is placed on issues such as phoneme–grapheme correspondence, name standardisation, dual-script coexistence, digital infrastructure, and public reception. The analysis culminates in a set of actionable lessons for Kazakhstan's ongoing Latinisation reform, advocating for a balanced approach that integrates historical continuity, digital usability, and inclusive linguistic policy.

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## 1. Introduction

Script reform is never merely a matter of orthographic adjustment – it is a deeply cultural, political, and identity-laden undertaking. As Kazakhstan prepares for the full implementation of its Latin script by 2031, it joins a long list of nations that have undergone significant script transitions (Zharkynbekova et al. 2024). From the early 20th-century reforms in Turkey to post-Soviet shifts in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and more recent dynamics in Moldova and the Western Balkans, script change has always intersected with broader questions of national identity, linguistic modernisation, and cultural alignment.

Kazakhstan's own history reflects this complexity. Having moved from Arabic to Latin in the early Soviet period (1929–1940), and then to Cyrillic in 1940 under Stalinist policies, Kazakhstan is now reversing this trajectory. The current reform, initiated under President Nursultan Nazarbayev and reaffirmed by his successor Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, aims to decolonise the country's linguistic landscape, foster digital compatibility, and strengthen ties to the Turkic linguistic world. However, the reform's success will depend not only on technical precision but also on how it manages the transliteration and standardisation of anthroponyms and toponyms that carry immense symbolic weight.

This article analyses Kazakhstan's Latinisation project through a comparative lens. Drawing on historical and contemporary examples from Turkic-speaking countries (Turkey, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan), Romance-speaking regions (Romania and Moldova), and Slavic-speaking states in the Western Balkans (Montenegro, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina), it explores how proper names have functioned as cultural barometers in the midst of script transitions. In each case, names were not simply converted from one alphabet to another; they were reshaped, contested, and negotiated in ways that reflected – and often amplified – sociopolitical tensions.

By synthesising these cross-regional experiences, the article identifies shared patterns, divergent strategies, and persistent

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challenges in name transliteration and onomastic standardisation. Special attention is given to issues such as phoneme–grapheme correspondence, diacritic management, technological usability, archival continuity, and the ideological implications of name reform. A comparative table summarises these features across ten countries, offering a structured framework for Kazakhstan's policymakers, linguists, and educators.

The central argument is that Kazakhstan must not treat name Latinization as a purely mechanical process. Instead, it must embed transliteration within broader strategies of national identity formation, digital governance, educational policy, and public engagement. Proper names – anchored in history but projected into the future – are at the heart of this transition. Their successful management may well determine the reform's long-term legitimacy and effectiveness.

## 2. Strategic Priorities and Implementation Challenges of Kazakhstan's Latinisation

Kazakhstan's transition to a Latin-based script, slated for full adoption by 2031, represents a state-directed linguistic and cultural transformation. Initiated in 2006 and revitalised by a presidential decree in 2017, the reform aims to break with Soviet-era linguistic legacies and realign the Kazakh language with its Turkic roots and the demands of global communication. This section outlines the reform's strategic objectives and explores the linguistic, phonetic, and institutional challenges confronting its implementation.

One of the central aims of the reform is cultural de-Sovietisation. By shifting away from Cyrillic, which was imposed during the Soviet era, Kazakhstan signals a symbolic and practical departure from Russification. The reform also seeks closer alignment with other Turkic-speaking nations such as Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan, all of which use Latin-based scripts (Lewis 1999; Landau & Kellner-Heinkele 2001). This linguistic solidarity reinforces Kazakhstan's regional identity and geopolitical ties.

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Another goal is digital modernisation. The Latin script, being globally dominant, is better suited for integration with digital platforms, search engines, and international databases. This transition enhances the usability of the Kazakh language in technological environments and global communication. Additionally, Latin alphabet facilitates the standardisation of the spelling of Kazakh proper names that are currently inconsistent across Soviet-era documents, passports, signage, and digital systems (Pavlenko 2008).

At the core of these objectives is also the aspiration to increase transparency and regularity in phoneme–grapheme correspondence. As early as 2017, public debates emerged around how the new Latin script could accurately represent the distinct sounds of Kazakh. Early versions of the alphabet proposed using apostrophes for specific sounds (e.g., *q′* for *қ*, *ń* for *ң*), but this raised concerns among linguists and IT experts alike. The apostrophes interfered with digital processing, caused search function issues, and were incompatible with domain naming systems (Comrie 2009). Moreover, the apostrophe-based system obscured root word recognition, further complicating reading fluency. Names such as *Қапшағай* (Kapshagay) and *Алматы* (Almaty) are rendered in ways that reflect their original pronunciations, emphasising the importance of linguistic precision in maintaining cultural authenticity (Rysbergen 2017: 14).

An additional concern lies in the inconsistencies in transliterating names. The same proper name might be written in various forms across documents and platforms – for example, Qazybek versus Kazybek. These discrepancies are not only a matter of orthographic variation but also pose challenges for legal identity recognition and database integration (Fierman 1991). Irregularities in official registries can lead to duplication, misidentification, or denial of services. This standardisation is essential for names like *Шымкент* (Shymkent) and *Байқоңыр* (Baikonur), which require coherence across diverse linguistic and technological contexts (Bazarbayeva 2017: 12).

Further complicating the situation is the issue of Russian-derived surnames. A significant proportion of the population still uses

surnames ending in *-ov* and *-ova*, reflecting Russian naming conventions. The Latinisation reform raises the question of whether these surnames should be retained in their existing morphological forms (*Omarov*) or modified in line with Kazakh linguistic structures (*Omaruly*). The debate touches on deeper issues of postcolonial identity, linguistic sovereignty, and the symbolic distancing from Russian influence (Rysbergen 2017: 14; Shamilov 2022: 24).

Institutional inertia also presents formidable challenges. Many governmental, legal, and educational institutions continue to operate with databases and documentation systems that are entirely Cyrillic-based. Archival materials, court records, diplomas, and cadastral registries would all require either transliteration or dual-script compatibility to maintain administrative continuity (Saparov 2002).

In light of these issues, Kazakhstan has pursued a phased introduction strategy. Since 2019, Latin-script textbooks and learning materials have been gradually introduced in selected pilot schools. This effort has been supported by teacher retraining programs under the Ministry of Education, which focus on Latin orthography and pronunciation norms. Nevertheless, a comprehensive nationwide rollout remains uneven, particularly in rural regions.

The government has also promoted digital infrastructure to support the reform. Online transliteration engines, Latin-script keyboards, and searchable corpora are being developed in parallel with the reform process. The national e-government portal now allows users to input names in both scripts, though back-end inconsistencies remain a problem for systems integration (Vajda 2006).

Public visibility is slowly increasing. Bilingual signage – often in both Latin and Cyrillic – is now common in cities such as Almaty and Astana. However, implementation in rural regions has lagged behind due to a lack of digital infrastructure and limited public awareness campaigns.

Finally, educational strategy plays a pivotal role. Shift to Latin-based writing is not just a policy shift but a pedagogical

transformation. As seen in Romania's experience, the incorporation of Latin-script personal names into primers and schoolbooks had a long-term impact on national identity formation and orthographic habits. A similar process is underway in Kazakhstan, with children's exposure to standardised Latinised name forms expected to normalize these variants in public life.

Ultimately, Kazakhstan's Latinisation is not merely an administrative reform but a sociolinguistic reconfiguration. It demands a coordinated policy that balances phonetic fidelity with usability, respects cultural sensitivities, and harmonises bureaucratic systems. As the comparative case studies in the following sections illustrate, successful script reform depends not only on a coherent alphabet but also on sustained institutional, educational, and digital support.

### 3. Historical background: Kazakhstan's Early Latin Script (1929-1940)

Kazakhstan's adoption of the Latin script from 1929 to 1940, through the introduction of Yañalif, marked a pivotal moment in its linguistic history. The term Yañalif (from Turkic *yaŋï aliifba*, meaning "new alphabet") refers to the Latin-based unified Turkic alphabet introduced in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s and used in various Turkic republics, including Kazakhstan, before the switch to Cyrillic in the 1940s. This reform, part of a broader Soviet effort to modernise Turkic languages, replaced the Arabic script to improve literacy and align writing systems with phonetic principles. Designed with 32 letters, including diacritical marks for unique Turkic sounds such as *q* and *ä*, Yañalif better reflected Kazakh phonetics, addressing shortcomings of the Arabic script (Kirkwood 1989).

Beyond linguistic benefits, the transition had strong cultural and political motives. The Latin script symbolised a break from Islamic influences and fostered a unified, secular Soviet identity. Literacy campaigns using Yañalif significantly raised education levels and helped disseminate Soviet ideology. However, this progress was short-lived, as Cyrillic replaced Latin in 1940 to consolidate ties with Russian

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culture (Vajda 2006).

Despite its advantages, Yañalif faced challenges. The use of diacritics posed technical difficulties, and the brief institutionalisation period led to unstable literacy practices (Rysbergen 2017: 15). Borrowed words were transliterated unsystematically, complicating integration with Russian orthographic conventions (Shamilov 2022: 24).

Kazakhstan's early experience with Yañalif provides valuable insights for its current transition to Latin. By addressing historical challenges and leveraging modern technologies, the reform reconnects Kazakhstan with its Turkic heritage while facilitating global integration. This historical precedent underscores the importance of balancing linguistic accuracy, cultural identity, and practical usability in script reform.

## 4. Comparative Insights from Turkic-Speaking Countries

### 4.1. Turkey: Phonetic Precision and National Unity through Script Reform

Turkey's 1928 switch from the Arabic to the Latin script under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk remains one of the most influential script reforms among Turkic-speaking nations. The reform was part of a broader modernisation and Westernisation agenda, implemented through the "Law on the Adoption and Implementation of the Turkish Alphabet." The reform introduced a Latin-based alphabet with 29 letters, deliberately designed for phonetic transparency, ensuring nearly perfect one-to-one phoneme–grapheme correspondence (Lewis 1999). For instance, the grapheme "ç" represents /tʃ/, and "ş" represents /ʃ/, aligning orthographic form with spoken Turkish.

This standardisation eliminated historical ambiguities from the Arabic script, which had been poorly adapted to Turkish phonology, and dramatically increased literacy rates. The reform was backed by an aggressive literacy campaign and state-led education initiatives, providing a model of what coordinated policy and infrastructure

investment can achieve (Lewis 1999).

### 4.2. Azerbaijan: Orthographic Precision vs. Practical Functionality

Azerbaijan reintroduced the Latin script in 1992 following its independence from the Soviet Union. The new alphabet included phonemically appropriate characters such as ə for /æ/, ş for /ʃ/, ç for /tʃ/, and ɪ for the unrounded high central vowel. While linguistically sound, these diacritic-rich letters posed practical difficulties in everyday use, particularly in digital environments with limited support for non-standard characters (Comrie 2009).

In early execution phases, inconsistencies were common due to technological limitations. According to Johanson and Csató (1998), publishing standards varied significantly across regions and media formats. Generational differences also contributed to dual-script usage, with older populations maintaining Cyrillic literacy and younger groups favouring Latin in education and online communication. Despite these challenges, the script modernisation process marked a significant shift in national identity formation and cultural alignment toward the broader Turkic world and the West.

### 4.3. Uzbekistan: Between Reform Ambitions and Cyrillic Persistence

Uzbekistan officially adopted a Latin alphabet in 1993, which avoided diacritics in favour of digraphs (e.g., *sh* for /ʃ/ and *ch* for /tʃ/), aiming to streamline technological integration. Nonetheless, the transition has been slow and uneven, largely due to the entrenched use of Cyrillic in official and cultural life (Pavlenko 2008). As of 2020, Cyrillic remains common in newspapers, street signage, and legal documents.

The alphabet reform was originally designed to assert post-Soviet independence and reconnect with pre-Soviet Turkic traditions. However, public confusion over digraphs, a lack of institutional alignment, and fluctuating educational policy have impeded

implementation. Orthographic forms such as *O'zbekiston* illustrate the careful balancing act between local phonology and global digital standards (Landau & Kellner-Heinkele 2001).

Recent efforts to revise the Latin script again signal ongoing tensions between linguistic fidelity and usability. In 2021, a new version of the Latin alphabet was proposed to reduce confusion and standardise application, though the reform's long-term success remains uncertain.

### 4.4. Turkmenistan: Script Reform as a National Rebranding Project

Turkmenistan adopted a Latin script in 1993, following a similar trajectory to its Central Asian neighbours. Its initial alphabet mirrored Turkish orthography but was modified in 1999 to include unique graphemes better suited to Turkmen phonology, such as *ň* for [ŋ], *ž* for [ʒ], and *ÿ* for [j] (Schlyter 1999).

The reform was politically driven and centrally managed. The Turkmen government rapidly replaced Cyrillic in education, media, and administration, emphasising script reform as a pillar of national identity. As in other cases, however, technological constraints posed difficulties. Characters such as *ň* and *ž* are not widely supported in international digital systems, complicating international communication and database integration (Grenoble & Whaley 2006).

Turkmenistan's reform stands out for its speed and clarity of vision but remains an instructive case of the tension between linguistic purity and technological interoperability. The transformation of names – from *Туркменбаши* to "Türkmenbaşy," and from *Ашгабат* to "Aşgabat" – represents a deliberate shift in national branding and international positioning.

## 5. Experiences of Cyrillic-to-Latin Transition in Romance Contexts

The transition from Cyrillic to Latin script in 19th-century Romania and 20th-century Moldova represents one of the most

illustrative historical cases of alphabet reform intersecting with the cultural and administrative challenges of proper names. Across educational, legal, and identity domains, the Romanian example underscores the profound implications of script reform on nomina propria, providing parallels, cautionary tales, and methodological insights.

### 5.1. Romania: Gradual Transition and Its Fragmented Orthography

Romania's shift from Cyrillic to Latin script unfolded gradually, unevenly across regions such as Wallachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania. Multiple transitional alphabets coexisted, with authors, publishers, and educational institutions deploying varied combinations of Latin and Cyrillic letters. The absence of a centralised orthographic standard during this transitional phase led to considerable inconsistency in spelling, particularly affecting proper names. Official documents, literary works, and newspapers often spelled the same name differently, depending on region or publisher. For example, the name *Petre* was promoted in Slavic-influenced orthography, while the Transylvanian School encouraged the Latinised *Petru* to emphasise Roman heritage (Frincu et al. 2023).

This phenomenon created a corpus of records with multiple coexisting forms of personal and place names, complicating later efforts to harmonise historical documents. In birth registers, land deeds, and church records, the same individual might appear under variant spellings, undermining administrative clarity and genealogical continuity (Frincu et al. 2023).

### 5.2. Educational Materials as Vehicles of Name Standardization

Carmen Stînea (2018) highlights the pivotal role of primers (*abecedare*) in embedding the Latin script and standardising name spellings in Romanian education. These textbooks often presented letters in three parallel scripts (Cyrillic, transitional, Latin), linking

each letter to a proper name to aid memorisation. For instance, each letter was accompanied by a name beginning with that letter, printed in both handwritten and block letters.

Such practices were more than pedagogical devices; they functioned as implicit standardisers of name forms. By privileging certain spellings in primers, educational materials effectively canonised specific orthographic representations of names for generations of learners. Zaharia Boiu's 1861 primer deliberately substituted foreign names from German models with Romanian names to foster cultural localisation and national identity (Stînea 2018).

### 5.3. Transliteration Challenges and Variant Name Forms

Frincu et al. (2023) document the technical difficulties of transliterating proper names during Romania's transition. Ambiguous letter mappings, character similarity errors (e.g., Cyrillic *C* vs. Latin *C* or *S*), and divergent diacritic application plagued efforts to render names consistently in Latin script. Moreover, machine learning models trained to transliterate transitional Romanian texts struggled particularly with proper names, producing high error rates due to rare or irregular spellings. Manual review and validation proved essential for accurate transliteration of anthroponyms and toponyms.

The Transylvanian School's advocacy for the Latin script was intertwined with a broader cultural-political project of asserting Romania's Latin heritage and distancing from Slavic influence. This ideological agenda extended to names: Latinised forms of personal and place names were promoted to reflect Roman origins, reshaping anthroponymy and toponymy as expressions of nationalist identity. The preference for *Petru* over *Petre*, or for Latin etymologies in toponyms, was not merely orthographic but symbolic.

Ionel Boamfă (2018) reveals that anthroponyms derived from Romanian historical-geographic regions (*Moldovean*, *Ardelean*, *Ungurean*) proliferated as markers of regional origin. Such names diversified as migrants moved across the Carpathian-Balkan space,

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acquiring local suffixes and phonetic adaptations (*Ungurean* becoming *Ungurjanovic* in Slavic contexts). These variations reflect linguistic contact zones and administrative recording practices across multiple scripts (Latin, Cyrillic, Greek, Hungarian). The coexistence of variant forms poses challenges for harmonising records across scripts and jurisdictions.

Romania's post-1862 need to standardise names recorded in mixed scripts illustrates the retrospective burden of name harmonisation following a prolonged, decentralised transition. Records in Cyrillic, transitional, and Latin scripts preserved variant name forms that later required reconciliation for legal, genealogical, and administrative purposes (Frincu et al. 2023; Stînea 2018).

### 5.4. The Impact of Moldova's Script Transitions on Proper Names

The Republic of Moldova has experienced multiple shifts in writing systems over the past century, oscillating between the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets under differing political regimes. These changes have had substantial ramifications on the representation, standardisation, and cultural perception of proper nouns. This subsection examines how these orthographic transitions impacted personal names, place names, and institutional titles, with particular focus on issues of transliteration, identity continuity, and archival stability.

Moldova's language policies throughout the 20th century were closely tied to political ideologies. The first Latinisation wave (1925–1938), undertaken in the Moldavian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (MASSR), sought to align Moldovan with other Soviet minority languages undergoing a shift from Cyrillic to Latin scripts. Ironically, this was not a re-alignment with Romanian standards but a politically motivated, experimental reform that generated hybrid orthographic conventions. Proper names during this period were often transliterated phonetically, influenced by local dialects, or altered to fit Russian or Ukrainian phonological patterns, which disrupted their

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etymological consistency and cultural recognisability (Voronovici 2010: 68).

By contrast, the second Latinisation wave of 1989, occurring as Moldova transitioned from Soviet control, was a bottom-up movement emphasising national revival. Its goal was to restore Romanian orthographic standards, including the correct diacritics and spellings of personal and geographical names. This reform attempted to undo decades of Soviet linguistic engineering and re-anchor Moldovan identity in the broader Romanian cultural-linguistic sphere (King 2000).

### 5.5. Technical and Ideological Issues

Transliteration of proper names from Moldovan Cyrillic to Latin script has been fraught with challenges due to the lack of one-to-one phoneme-grapheme correspondence and inconsistencies in historical documentation. The Library of Congress Transliteration Guide for Moldovan Cyrillic, for instance, relies on a Russian Romanisation system, which introduces a "third variant" of proper names – neither identical to the original Cyrillic spelling nor the Romanian Latin equivalent. For example, the Moldovan Cyrillic *Кишинэу* is rendered as *Kishinėu*, rather than the standard Romanian *Chişinău* (Academia Română, 2010). This variant spelling is commonly found in Western cataloguing systems and reflects Soviet influence embedded into transliteration practices.

Furthermore, Romanian diacritics critical for distinguishing meaning and identity – ă, ş, ţ – are frequently lost or misrepresented in these transliterations, further distancing the resulting forms from their cultural roots. Names such as *Ion Ţepeş* may appear in catalog records as "Ion Tsepeš", reflecting a Russified phonetic interpretation rather than a culturally faithful reproduction.

One of the most tangible consequences of non-uniform transliteration has been the bureaucratic confusion in personal identification and archival research. Official documents, civil

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registries, and educational records from the Soviet period often feature names in Cyrillic that were erratically adapted into Latin after 1989. This has resulted in cases where a single individual may have multiple official variants of their name (e.g., Mihail Eminescu vs. Mikhail Eminesku), complicating genealogical research, citizenship verification, and scholarly citation.

As summarised in a Moldovan government report[2] (ANACEC, 2022), the transition generated a fragmented landscape in which Latin and Cyrillic variants coexist, particularly in regions such as Transnistria, where Cyrillic usage persists. This fragmentation also extends to toponyms, where names such as *Tiraspol*, *Bălţi*, or *Dubăsari* may be encountered in Sovietised, Romanianised, or hybrid forms across documents, signage, and databases.

### 5.6. Orthographic Identity and Onomastic Stability

Beyond administrative concerns, the Moldovan case illustrates the symbolic role of orthography in shaping identity. As King (2000) observes, the deliberate distancing of Moldovan from Romanian norms through orthographic manipulation served as a tool for cultural and political separation. Proper names, by virtue of their fixed, inherited nature, became battlegrounds of this ideological struggle.

Irina Condrea's (2019) analysis of religious texts written in Romanian Cyrillic highlights the difficulties in transcribing historical names accurately due to scriptio continua, absence of diacritics, and archaic spelling conventions. The process of identifying and restoring these names requires both linguistic expertise and contextual historical knowledge. Condrea notes the orthographic fluidity in the representation of names like *Ion, Ioan*, and *Ioann* across texts, each reflecting not only temporal shifts but also regional and denominational variations.

The persistence of Russified or hybrid forms of proper names

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[2] Available: https://www.anacec.md/files/1.D_Anexa_Raport_ANACEC_2022.pdf (accessed May 12, 2025)

in everyday life and institutional usage demonstrates the enduring cultural memory shaped by orthographic policy. Even after Moldova's official return to Latin script, names transliterated during the Soviet period remain common in older signage, bibliographic records, and oral traditions.

For onomastic scholars, this presents both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge lies in accurately tracing the evolution and transmission of names through layers of political and orthographic change. The opportunity lies in using these names as markers of historical memory, linguistic contact, and identity negotiation. The multiplicity of forms – *Chişinău*, *Kishinėu*, *Kishinev* – offers a palimpsest through which Moldova's complex cultural narrative can be read.

## 6. Latin by Practice, Cyrillic by Law: The Silent Evolution of Proper Noun Usage in the Western Balkans

### 6.1. Montenegro: Script, Identity, and the Politicisation of Names

Montenegro's approach to script usage reflects an ongoing effort to differentiate national identity in a post-Yugoslav landscape. Although both Latin and Cyrillic are constitutionally equal, Latin has become the dominant script in education, public signage, and digital communication. This is not merely a stylistic preference but a political signal – distancing the Montenegrin linguistic space from Serbian influence (Melnytska 2016).

Linguist Vojislav Nikčević's promotion of Montenegrin involved the standardisation of orthography, including the introduction of phonemes such as /ś/ and /ź/, which impacted the spelling of native and borrowed names. These orthographic reforms affected anthroponyms and toponyms alike. Njegoš's literary legacy, for instance, has become the subject of orthographic reinterpretation. His association with both Serbian and Montenegrin canons has led to debates about how his name and works should be rendered in modern Montenegrin. Codified forms of names stemming from these reforms

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were often criticised for being disconnected from vernacular use, indicating the tension between linguistic modernisation and cultural resonance (Melnytska 2016).

Street and school names became contested spaces where identity was negotiated through orthographic choices. For example, names associated with shared Yugoslav heritage or pan-Serbian identity were re-labelled in ways that reflected the emergent Montenegrin identity, sometimes without sufficient public consensus. These practices show how the treatment of proper names – far from being a technical matter – functioned as a site of symbolic nation-building.

### 6.2.    Serbia: Cyrillic Heritage and Latin Pragmatism

In Serbia, the constitutional status of Cyrillic as the official script belies a far more complex reality in everyday practice. Albury-Garcés (2024) frames this complexity through the lens of "linguistic citizenship" – the idea that language practices, including the script one chooses for writing one's own name, signal broader political and cultural affiliations.

His empirical study shows a generational and regional divide: while 50.5% of participants preferred Cyrillic for writing their names, 42.9% used Latin, and a minority used both. Younger people leaned toward Cyrillic, influenced by nationalistic education reforms. Older Serbians, shaped by the Yugoslav era, often preferred Latin, associating it with openness and regional connectivity. In urban areas such as Novi Sad, Latin script dominated, reflecting multicultural environments, while rural areas like Niš saw a predominance of Cyrillic, closely tied to Orthodox and national identity (Albury-Garcés 2024: 178).

This script duality directly affects the onomastic landscape. Personal names are written differently depending on region, ideology, or generation. While "Milica" may be rendered as *Милица* in traditional contexts, many Serbians prefer *Milica* in informal digital settings or when communicating internationally. Participants in the

study cited the perceived modernity, readability, and technological compatibility of the Latin script as reasons for choosing it, especially in email signatures, social media handles, and informal documentation.

Albury-Garcés highlights that such choices are not always ideologically driven. For some, they are acts of practicality. Yet, even these pragmatic acts accumulate sociopolitical meaning over time, contributing to what he calls a "silent orthographic shift".

### 6.3. Bosnia and Herzegovina: Multiscriptality and Digital Onomastic Infrastructure

Bosnia and Herzegovina presents the most complex case in the Western Balkans due to its deep multiscriptal tradition. In addition to Latin and Cyrillic, the country historically used Glagolitic, Arebica, and Bosnian Cyrillic (Bosančica). While no formal script reform has occurred, a de facto preference for Latin is evident in state institutions, media, and urban signage, particularly among Bosniaks and Croats. Cyrillic remains associated primarily with the Serbian population in Republika Srpska (Ćušić 2023).

What distinguishes Bosnia is its digital infrastructure for onomastic work. The University of Sarajevo's e-bosanski platform features an Accent Dictionary of Names that documents accentual variation in names like *Ismet*, *Admir*, and *Aida*. It also offers phonological tools for pronunciation training and the transcription of names in multiple historical scripts.

Alphabet conversion tools allow users to transform Latin script into Arebica, Glagolitic, or Bosnian Cyrillic, supporting cultural preservation and academic research. Moreover, the e-bosanski platform has catalogued over 100 accent doublets, contributing to more accurate name recognition and pronunciation in digital environments. These innovations not only safeguard linguistic diversity but also position Bosnia as a regional leader in the digital processing of proper names.

Moreover, Bosnia leverages the Croatian NER system CroNER

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for Named Entity Recognition in Bosnian texts, an efficient interim solution given the linguistic closeness of the two languages. This technology allows for semi-automated classification of anthroponyms, toponyms, and organisation names – key assets for digitising historical records and constructing interoperable name databases across the post-Yugoslav space.

## 7. Unified Comparative Table

The following table presents a cross-regional comparison of countries that have undergone or are undergoing a Cyrillic-to-Latin script reform. It focuses specifically on how these transitions have impacted the representation and standardisation of proper names.

| Country | Reform Period | Script Status | Treatment of Proper Names | Phoneme-Grapheme Ratio | Standardisa-tion measures |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Turkey** | 1928 | Fully Latin (since reform) | Full restandardisa-tion; names adapted to new Latin | Very high (designed for 1:1 phonemic mapping) | State-led reforms; alphabet law; full educat. rollout |
| **Azerbai-jan** | 1991 | Latin official; Cyrillic in decline | Cyrillic-based names re-rendered in Latin (e.g., Əli, Şirin) | High; uses unique graphemes (ç, ş, ı) for phonemes | Government standardisa-tion; typographic adaptation in passports |
| **Uzbeki-stan** | 1993–ongoing | Latin official; Cyrillic widely used in parallel | Dual-script forms common; surnames fluctuate | Moderate; simplified Latin (sh, ch, oʻ) causes ambiguity | Partial reform; unclear enforcement; ongoing adjustments |
| **Turkme-** | 1991 | Fully Latin | Names | High; includes | Full |

| Country | Reform Period | Script Status | Treatment of Proper Names | Phoneme-Grapheme Ratio | Standardisa-tion measures |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **nistan** | | | adapted with Turkmen phonemes ("Bäşim", "Türkmen") | special letters (ç, ň, ž) | government standardisa-tion; broad media and educat. use |
| **Kazakh-stan** | 2017–2031 (planned) | Transition phase; Cyrillic still dominant | Many variants in use: Qazybek / Kazybek; -ov/-uly debate | Moderate; apostrophe model rejected; revised orthographies ongoing | Stepwise rollout; pilot textbooks; draft transliteration tables |
| **Monte-negro** | Post-2006 | Cyrillic official; Latin dominant in practice | Latin preferred in signage; dual spelling traditions persist | Moderate–high (Latin fits ijekavian dialect better than Cyrillic) | Codified Montenegrin orthography with ś/ź; cultural disputes remain |
| **Serbia** | No reform; digraphia since 1954 | Cyrillic official; Latin widely used | Choice of name script reflects identity (Marko / Марко) | High in both scripts; Cyrillic closer to native tradition | No formal policy; user-driven practice; dual-script registries |
| **Bosnia-Herzego-vina** | No reform; digraphia | Script use split by ethnicity and region | Bosniak/ Croat names in Latin; Serbian names in Cyrillic | High for Latin; Cyrillic still used in heritage contexts | No unified standard; e-bosanski platform supports initiatives |
| **Romania** | 1830s–1862 | Latin-only since 1862 | Transition period saw | High after standardisation; | Standardised via education, |

| Country | Reform Period | Script Status | Treatment of Proper Names | Phoneme-Grapheme Ratio | Standardisation measures |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | hybrid name spellings (Petre → Petru) | confusion during mixed-script phase | printing reform, institutional use |
| **Moldova** | 1989 (Latin reintrodu-ced) | Latin official; Cyrillic persists in Transnistria | Cyrillic "Ivan" → Latin "Ion"; re-Romanisation of surnames | High in Latin; legacy Cyrillic versions still circulate | Constitutional Latinisation; conflicts in minority regions |

**Table 1.** *Cyrillic-to-Latin Script Reform and Proper Names Regulation*

### Conclusions: Cross-Cultural Lessons for Kazakhstan's Latinisation

The cross-cultural experiences of countries that transitioned from Cyrillic to Latin scripts – across Turkic, Slavic, and Romance-speaking regions – offer Kazakhstan a wealth of strategic insights as it prepares for the full enactment of Latin orthography by 2031. These cases illustrate that script reform is never a mere procedural adjustment, but a profound act of symbolic reorientation, sociolinguistic negotiation, and administrative restructuring. Nowhere is this more visible than in the domain of proper names, which embody the tensions among phonetic accuracy, historical continuity, and political identity.

The Turkish reform (1928) demonstrates the long-term success of bold, centralised reform backed by education and institutional alignment. However, later reforms in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan show that even technically well-designed alphabets face serious obstacles when digraphs, diacritics, or legacy name forms are unevenly handled. Azerbaijan's challenges with digital usability of name-specific graphemes and Uzbekistan's slow and uneven adoption

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of Latinised name forms illustrate that even phonetic fidelity must be tempered with considerations of practical implementation and public literacy.

From the Western Balkans, Montenegro warns of the politicisation of orthography, especially when reforms attempt to codify ethnic identity through name spellings. Serbia shows that even without official alphabet reform, name script usage can fragment across generations and regions, requiring policymakers to anticipate user-driven variation. Bosnia offers a rare model of script coexistence, where Latin and Cyrillic versions of names survive side by side – facilitated by platforms like *e-bosanski* that provide digital support for accentuation, historical name forms, and script conversion. Romania and Moldova teach that early script reform efforts, if not well regulated, can result in coexisting and competing orthographic traditions for the same names, which persist in archives, public documents, and family records.

For Kazakhstan, these cases underline that the transliteration of proper names must be governed by inclusive, historically informed, and digitally equipped policy frameworks. A few strategic imperatives follow:

• **Public dialogue is essential**: Top-down decisions, particularly about personal and family name spellings, must be balanced by broad public consultation and sensitivity to linguistic heritage.

• **Standardisation must precede enforcement**: Clear and publicly available transliteration guidelines for anthroponyms and toponyms should be established before application, possibly modelled on Turkey's alphabet law or Romania's typographic reform.

• **Onomastic databases should be centralised and inclusive**: Kazakhstan would benefit from building a digital corpus of existing Cyrillic-based name variants (including those of Russian, Uyghur, and Tatar origin) and their proposed Latin

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equivalents, allowing users to search, validate, and adapt names across generations and languages.

• **Phoneme-grapheme transparency should be improved without sacrificing usability**: Kazakhstan's rejection of apostrophes and overcomplicated digraphs reflects a desire for cleaner digital integration. But phonetic accuracy must not be abandoned. Revisions should be reviewed by interdisciplinary teams of phonologists, IT developers, and cultural historians.

• **Latinisation should not erase memory**: Archival and genealogical continuity is at stake. Romania and Moldova illustrate how mixed-script records can create long-term legal ambiguity. Kazakhstan should develop tools that link old and new forms of names across ID systems, land registries, and historical archives.

• **Cultural narratives matter**: As seen in Montenegro, the reform of proper names is often perceived as a reinterpretation of history. Kazakhstan must be transparent in its goals – whether it aims to "Kazakhize" names, harmonise multilingual traditions, or signal Turkic affiliation – while avoiding divisive ethnolinguistic messaging.

In short, Kazakhstan stands at a linguistic crossroads. If it treats name transliteration as merely a mechanical process, it risks administrative disruption, public resistance, and cultural disconnection. But if it draws on the comparative lessons from the Balkans, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe, it has the opportunity to position script reform as a national renewal project – one that balances tradition and innovation, local heritage and global integration.

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