Title:	Request for SC2 member comments on proposal to encode "Ruble sign with double vertical stem"
Source:	Unicode Consortium
Status:	Liaison contribution
Action:	For consideration by ISO/IEC JTC 1/SC 2
Date:	2024-12-26

Summary

Experts in the Unicode Technical Committee reviewed a proposal to encode a *Pridnestrovian ruble sign* (L2/24-134) and concluded that the proposal meets technical criteria for encoding (but with a different character name). This case is unusual, however, because its use is associated with a region that is not internationally recognized as having independent status. Beyond the usual technical criteria, neither SC2 nor Unicode has established decision criteria to apply in a case like this that would disqualify it, yet the character could be considered problematic to support by some implementers. For this reason, Unicode believes this proposal warrants special consideration by SC2 member bodies, and so invites feedback on this proposal.

Unicode's evaluation of technical merits

The proposal document presents evidence that Unicode experts found satisfy the technical criteria for encoding generally applied by SC2/WG2 experts and Unicode, including:

- The proposed character is a text element that cannot be represented by any existing character or character sequence.
- It is not a logo or encumbered by intellectual property claims.
- The character is in active use by a user community, primarily in a region referred to as "Pridnestrovie", which is more generally known as "Transnistria" (see below for more background on this region). This usage includes contexts in which public, digital data exchange would be expected.

The currency this symbol is used to represent is variably referred to as the "Pridnestrovian Ruble" (as in this proposal), or as the "Transnistrian Ruble". This currency has not been assigned an ISO 4217 currency code, but within the user community and elsewhere, the unofficial code "PRB" is used. In addition to the evidence and references provided in the proposal, independent references to this currency can be found, including contexts in which digital information exchange of monetary amounts can be expected. Some examples:

- https://fxrate.org/PRB/
- https://www.curs.biz/en/valuta/PRB
- https://www.fxrateslive.com/PRB
- https://github.com/ourworldincode/currency

The name proposed for this character in L2/24-134, "Pridnestrovian ruble sign", is controversial. An earlier proposal, L2/23-022, had proposed the same character using the name "Transnistrian ruble sign". This pertains to a broader controversy related to the associated region. To avoid the controversy regarding the name, Unicode experts recommended, instead, that the character name be derived from its appearance: RUBLE SIGN WITH DOUBLE VERTICAL STEM.

Based on *technical merits*, the Unicode Technical Committee concluded that the proposed character, with that alternative name, is a valid candidate for encoding.

However, UTC also recognized that the character is associated with some geo-political controversies and so should be given careful consideration by SC2 member bodies. This special aspect of the proposed character will be considered next.

Non-technical considerations

As explained above, there is controversy regarding name of the currency sign and of the underlying currency: "Pridnestrovian ruble" versus "Transnistrian ruble". These alternate names are associated with dispute over the region itself:

- The region has been disputed since shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1989. After a brief military conflict, a ceasefire agreement was negotiated that resulted in the disputed status that remains unresolved.[1]
- The region in question is not, in general, recognized internationally as independent of Moldova.[2] For example, it is not recognized as a member state of the United Nations or assigned an identifier by the UN Statistics Division.[3, 4]
- The local political administration claims independence from Moldova and refers to the region as "Pridnestrovie"; it considers the term "Transnistria" to be offensive.[5]

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[1] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transnistria for an overview.
[2] For example, in 2022, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted the position that the "Transnistrian region" was a part of Moldova under military occupation—see https://pace.coe.int/en/files/29885/html.
[3] Member States | United Nations
[4] UNSD — Methodology
[5] See https://novostipmr.com/en/news/19-04-18/president-pmr-term-transnistria-occupational-concept-offensive.

- The Republic of Moldova designates this region as part of "Unitățile Administrativ-Teritoriale din stînga Nistrului" ('Administrative-Territorial Units of the Left Bank of the Dniester'),[6] but it is often referred to by the informal name "Transnistria".

As explained in L2/24-134, the currency came into use in 1994, shortly after the ceasefire agreement that resulted in the current disputed status of the region. The currency is not, in general, recognized internationally and can only be exchanged with certain organizations or in certain networks, but there are organizations outside the region that do recognize it.

Thus, it is clear that the currency in question and the proposed symbol are used in public interchange, though with associated circumstances that are controversial.

Because of the associated geopolitical controversy, some vendors implementing support for the UCS could consider support of this character problematic, and some SC2 member bodies could be inclined against encoding the character.

We are not aware of any non-technical criteria having been used by SC2 or WG2 in the past that could be applied to disqualify this character. We are also concerned that adopting a criterion that allows for opposing a character because of association with politically or socially defined user communities could be problematic.

Regarding the possibility that implementers find it problematic to support the character, it should be noted that UCS conformance does not require implementers to support any particular UCS characters. Also, we are not aware of any regulatory or legal constraints against supporting the character. If encoded, then, implementers would be free to decide whether to implement support.

For these reasons, the Unicode Technical Committee concluded that technical merits alone provide a sufficient case for encoding this character. But we recognize the importance of SC2 member input in this case. Thus, we request SC2 members to carefully consider this case and provide comments.[7]

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[6] Administrative-Territorial Units of the Left Bank of the Dniester - Wikipedia

[7] As the proposed character has not yet been included in a draft of ISO/IEC 10646 7th edition, we proposed that members submit comments in a member contribution document circulated to SC2.