

## Pros and cons of the IDNs in the .bg zone

By Marina Mollova, Borislav Boyanov & Co.

Recently in Bulgaria, Register.BG, the authority to which the management of the .bg ccTLD is delegated, expanded the registration services for domain names in the .bg zone and the sub-zones by providing the opportunity to register Internationalized Domain Names (IDNs) in Cyrillic in the .bg zone. The registration of the IDNs requires the Internet name to be written only in Cyrillic and to contain at least one letter which can be visually distinguished from the Latin alphabet.

IDNs are particularly important for Bulgarians as in the Bulgarian alphabet there are a number of letters visually differing from the ASCII characters, such as б, г, д, ж, и, й, л, п, ф, ц, ч, ш, щ, ъ, ъ, ю, я. As any other innovation, **the IDNs quickly won both adherents and opponents**. There are already disputes on what are the actual benefits from their introduction.

It is believed that the usage of different languages on the Internet contributes to the development of Internet society, private business and others. The geographic expansion of the Internet, even to the most isolated areas in Bulgaria, and the corresponding increased use by various groups and communities that do not speak English or any other foreign language, predestines the need of IDNs in Cyrillic. Such IDNs are timely and necessary, albeit a small step in the evolution of the Internet technologies relating to Bulgaria.

On the one hand it is considered that Cyrillic IDNs provide non-English speaking Bulgarians with an opportunity for **easy and seamless access to information in their mother-language**. This is true, but only if a website is targeted exclusively to the Bulgarian audience and is entirely in Bulgarian. In this case, a domain name in ASCII characters would not bring any additional accessibility or, therefore, benefits the holder. However, if a website pursues global accessibility, it is logical that a domain name in Latin characters be preferred.

On the other hand, **alternation of Latin and Cyrillic** is inconvenient and can even be confusing. Furthermore, we cannot ignore the inconveniences related to the requirement for a Bulgarian keyboard and, in addition, the installation of Cyrillic language support software in order to gain access to the "global" web. Here, the question is to what extent this is really necessary, considering the various options provided by many other applications. Even the "simple" Google translator is sufficient to give an idea about the website's content for a non-English speaker.

Hence remains the "as thou wilt not – if thou wilt." solution.

But does it? Actually, the **introduction of IDNs resembles** forcing all popular institutions and reputable companies to pay for, and maintain, another domain name, which, given the global internationalization in all areas, is very likely to be unnecessary.

All .bg IDNs requested for registration are processed according to the regular procedure under the Terms and Conditions of Register.BG where the terms "protected" and "unprotected" domains are introduced. When registering a .bg domain name including an IDN, the registrant can choose between the following two options:

- To provide documents certifying grounds for registration of the domain (identical registrant's name, trademark registration or application valid in Bulgaria, name of a media program or a show, etc.). In this case, the domain name is registered as protected.
- Not to provide documents certifying grounds for registration of the domain. In this case, the domain name is registered as unprotected.

The second option means that actually anyone – with or without grounds, **in good or in bad faith, could register a .bg domain name or an IDN.**

Common practice shows that this option is primarily used for cybersquatting. Hence the need for more resources in terms of time, people and finances by companies on one side – to maintain IDNs, which they often don't need, and on the other side – to protect their intellectual property rights. I.e. companies will have to fight on another front with the inventive infringers.

Unfortunately, the domain name piracy is common practice in Bulgaria over recent years. Actions must be taken and effective means of limitation should be sought against that practice. In this regard are the provisions of the new Bulgarian Protection of Competition Act **against imitation of domain names**. The use of domain names which are identical or similar to those of other persons, in a manner that may mislead and/or injure the interests of competitors, is prohibited. This infringement is guarded by up to 10% of annual turnover sanctions – powerful tool in the fight against cybersquatting.

But will it be enough to stop the misuse of IDNs?... Hardly.

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