

# THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE COMARC FORMAT AS A RESULT OF THE EXPANDING COBISS.NET NETWORK

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## Abstract

The article describes the process of library automation in the Bulgarian National Library and the conversion of the records in their databases into the COMARC format and lists the reasons why COBISS software was chosen by the National Library of Bulgaria and other Bulgarian libraries. It also mentions the need to expand the COMARC format due to countries with different cataloguing practices participating in the COBISS.Net project.

## Keywords

library automation, cataloguing, COMARC

## Izvleček

Prispevek opisuje postopek avtomatizacije v Nacionalni knjižnici Bolgarije in konverzijo njenih zapisov v format COMARC ter navaja razloge, zakaj je Nacionalna knjižnica Bolgarije skupaj z drugimi bolgarskimi knjižnicami izbrala programsko opremo COBISS, ter omenja potrebo po razširitvi formata COMARC zaradi sodelovanja držav z različnimi katalogizacijskimi pravili v mreži COBISS.Net.

## Ključne besede

avtomatizacija knjižnic, katalogizacija, COMARC

## INTRODUCTION

The automation of libraries in Bulgaria started with a considerable delay. The first steps in this direction were made under financial constraints imposed on libraries and in the absence of a consistent national policy in this respect. The renewal of library technologies in the early 1990s relied solely on extra-budgetary support from foundations and other non-governmental organisations whose goal was the overall development of IT infrastructure in the country. That is why individual libraries made different decisions about their automation based on their opportunities and capabilities.

Despite this fact, library experts discussed the adoption of a unified communication format. After analysing and comparing the formats from the MARC family it was concluded that the UNIMARC format was appropriate because of the following reasons:

- The UNIMARC format was developed by IFLA's Pro-

gramme for UBC and approved by The Conference of European National Librarians (CENL) as the primary format for exchange of machine-readable bibliographic data between national bibliographic agencies.

- Originally, UNIMARC was created for the exchange of records created according to different national cataloguing rules. The variety of rules implies a lower degree of standardisation in UNIMARC than in MARC21, which is oriented towards specific rules, used in an English-speaking environment for creating records in English.
- It was developed systematically and did not rely on old practices such as MARC21.
- Due to the fractional segmentation of data, libraries using UNIMARC can convert records into MARC21, whereas the reverse conversion is not so successful. For example, it is the fractional segmentation of data in the format that makes it possible for punctuation to be automatically generated as required by the International Standard Bibliographic Description. This is definitely one of the benefits of the UNIMARC format.

The article is based on the presentation with the title Enhancement of COMARC as a result of expanding COBISS.Net given at the international conference UNIMARC 2014: 4th UNIMARC Users' Group Meeting in Maribor, Slovenia, on 14 May 2014.

Although the decision was made to implement UNIMARC, for various reasons this decision was not followed through. The UNIMARC format finally found its first real application in Bulgaria after the National Library joined the COBISS system in 2006. One of the reasons why the National Library of Bulgaria joined the COBISS system was that the latter uses the COMARC format, which has been developed on the basis of UNIMARC and has all the advantages of this format.

## UNIMARC FORMAT IN BULGARIA

### Translations

Although the UNIMARC format had no practical application in Bulgaria for a long time, its development had been monitored by experts from the National Library. In 2002, a translation into Bulgarian was made of the UNIMARC manual from *UNIMARC Manual: bibliographic format. 1994* (Ръководство за UNIMARC, <http://www.lib.bg/prevodi/unimarc/index.html>). Even though the translation was based on the UNIMARC Manual edition from 1994, it includes all the changes and additions made by the Universal Bibliographic Control and International MARC Core Programme (UBCIM) up to March 2002.

The following IFLA (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) publications were also translated into Bulgarian:

- ISBD (G): General International Standard Bibliographic Description (Общ международен стандарт за библиографско описание, [http://www.lib.bg/standarti/Isbd\\_g\\_all.pdf](http://www.lib.bg/standarti/Isbd_g_all.pdf))
- ISBD (CR): International Standard Bibliographic Description for Serials and Other Continuing Resources (Международен стандарт за библиографско описание на продължаващи издания и ресурси, [http://www.lib.bg/standarti/isbd\\_cr\\_all.pdf](http://www.lib.bg/standarti/isbd_cr_all.pdf))
- ISBD (ER): International Standard Bibliographic Description for Electronic Resources (Международен стандарт за библиографско описание на електронни ресурси, <http://www.lib.bg/publish/Издания-на-ИФЛА/Стандарти/103-Международен-стандарт-за-библиографско-описание-на-електронни-ресурси>)
- ISBD (NBM): International Standard Bibliographic Description of Non-Book Material (Международен стандарт за библиографско описание на неknижни материали, <http://www.lib.bg/publish/Издания-на-ИФЛА/Стандарти/102-Международен-стандарт-за-библиографско-описание-на-неknижни-материали>)
- Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records FRBR (Функционални изисквания към нормативните данни, <http://www.lib.bg/publish/>

IFLA/ifla\_frbr\_2009.pdf) and

- Functional requirements for authority data FRAD (Функционални изисквания към нормативните данни, [http://www.lib.bg/publish/IFLA/ifla\\_frad\\_2009.pdf](http://www.lib.bg/publish/IFLA/ifla_frad_2009.pdf))
- ISBD Consolidated Edition, 2012 (ISBD Международен стандарт за библиографско описание, 2012, <http://www.lib.bg/publish/Издания-на-ИФЛА/Стандарти/173-ISBD-Международен-стандарт-за-библиографско-описание-Консолидирано-издание,-2012>)
- The Guidelines for the application of the ISBDs to the description of component parts, 2003 (Ръководство за прилагане на ISBD при описание на съставни части, 2003)

The National Library of Bulgaria spent a lot of time searching for opportunities for the provision of an integrated automated system. In the early 1990s, due to its limited financial resources, the National Library concentrated on creating machine-readable records of the country's publishing production at the time as well as creating retrospective records for Bulgarian books starting from the beginning of the existence of the National Bibliography. The integrated library system was defined as a strategic task within the automation of library processes, which was postponed since it depended on limited financial resources provided by budgetary or extra-budgetary sources at that time.

Such policy of automation development required the use of software in order to create and exchange quality bibliographic records. As the application of the UNIMARC format was not possible when the automation process started, between 1992 and 2010, the Library used the free CDS/ISIS software, provided by UNESCO, to create bibliographic records (UNESCO, 2010). The purpose of the programme created in this way was to:

- create an information database that meets the international standards in order to make it possible to exchange machine-readable bibliographic records both within the country and abroad;
- provide the opportunity for printed output of the created database, thereby automating the activity of issuing the Current National Bibliography without changing the basic requirements of its optimal model;
- use a software product flexible enough to ensure the completion of the assigned tasks as well as to have the potential for developing the automation of other library activities and at the same time be consistent with the financial capacity of the library at the time.

The positive change started when in Maribor in 2006, the director of the National Library, Prof. Boryana Hristova, signed the Agreement on the establishment of the

COBISS.Net network and the free exchange of bibliographic records, created in autonomous library information systems of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Republic of Macedonia, Slovenia and Serbia (2003) on behalf of the Bulgarian libraries. The work on converting the library database into the COMARC format started two years later.

The preparation of conversion tables for the COMARC format took about two years. The main problem of converting the records was the absence of an international format during their creation. There were difficulties of different nature – from different cataloguing solutions that were not consistent over time to the absence of indicators and the lack of repetition of subfields in CDS/ISIS. A solution had to be found for all these deficiencies. This took place in close cooperation between the experts from IZUM and the National Library. As a result of that, 820,000 bibliographic records were converted at that time. In the COBISS.BG database, there are currently over 900,000 records in the COMARC format.

Since 2010, the National Library has been practically involved in the creation and exchange of bibliographic records through the COBISS.Net network. Being theoretically familiar with UNIMARC, the experts from the National Library have not only been applying the COMARC format, but have also had suggestions for its improvement.

### Development of the COMARC format

The COMARC format is pragmatically oriented. It was created on the basis of UNIMARC but it uses only the fields necessary at the particular moment of the cataloguing practice. Such development of COMARC was appropriate because the system was designed for and implemented in the libraries in Yugoslavia. In 2003, an *Agreement* was signed between the former Yugoslav republics for establishing the COBISS.Net network for the free exchange of bibliographic records created by their autonomous library information systems. They continued following common cataloguing principles and rules, due to the fact that up to a certain period they were part of the same state and the development of librarianship and cataloguing, in particular, was unified. This uniformity is an advantage of the COBISS system.

A need for change occurred when The National Library of Bulgaria joined the system and began working on the conversion of bibliographic records in the COMARC format. Although the cataloguing practice in Bulgaria is close to that of the other countries participating in the COBISS.Net network, it still has its special features.

The rules for creating name access points (Лютова, А. Г. (Lyutova, A. D.), et. al. eds., 1989, pp. 40–41) led to creating a solution, which was to add new fields in blocks 7XX and 9XX in COMARC/B (COMARC/B format za bibliografske podatke: priručnik za uporabnike, 2008) and block 7XX in COMARC/A (COMARC/A format za normativne podatke: priručnik za uporabnike, 2008).

Block 5XX of COMARC/B is very well developed, but the field 545, called Section title, which exists in UNIMARC, can be added.

According to the definition "This field contains the title of a general section in which a piece-analytic being catalogued is contained." According to the UNIMARC model for component parts "This could be a section for only one issue or a section that occurs repeatedly in issues of journal."

The presence of such a field would make the information in the bibliographic record more precise and describe the listed documents in more detail.

The COBISS.Net network is a system which has already brought together 7 countries and the idea is for it to continue expanding.

It is important which approach should be adopted when developing such unified systems. When adapting and developing the communication format based on UNIMARC, a decision should be made whether to include only fields necessary up to that stage or to include a maximum number of fields, so that no additional changes are necessary in case any future problems arise.

The UNIMARC format is constantly evolving in relation to the overall regulatory basis of cataloguing and the development of information technologies. The increasing worldwide unification in this area inevitably leads to common directions for the development of formats; however, countries such as Bulgaria, which do not have sufficient financial resources, cannot follow the development of the UNIMARC format. Until recently, the format was available online, and we were able to track changes. This way of access is no longer available, which limits its accessibility and affects its popularity.

UNIMARC has a lot of advantages, among which the following stand out:

- UNIMARC reflects the international experience in the electronic cataloguing of documents.
- UNIMARC was created following the general principles and at the same time including the specifics of national libraries and bibliographic agencies in order to ensure the international exchange of bibliographic data in machine-readable format.
- UNIMARC is the most modern and best-structured

Bibliographic Exchange Format, designed to be used in National Bibliographic Agencies and suitable for serving as a model for the development of new communication formats.

- UNIMARC reflects the specifics of bibliographic agencies.
- UNIMARC is maintained and developed by The Permanent UNIMARC Committee (PUC) at IFLA.

## Conclusion

Taking all these advantages into consideration, as well as the improvement of COMARC, which follows its development, I believe we have chosen the right partner in IZUM and the right path of development in the field of librarianship.

## Reference

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