ELISA BUSETTO:

Hi, everyone. Welcome to Meeting 12A of the SubPro IRT on 21 September 2023 at 13:00 UTC. My name is Elisa Busetto and I'm the remote participation manager for this session. This session is recorded and is governed by the ICANN Expected Standards of Behavior.

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LARS HOFFMANN:

Thank you, Elisa. Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, everybody. For our meeting, it was just up. I don't know which one, actually. Anyway, we have string similarity on the agenda today one more time. We're going to pass it over to Samad in just a minute. We're going to skip the information and status update slides. We looked at those on Tuesday. Elisa will kindly paste the link to the wiki page where we can find this deck from today that has the status and information slides in it, obviously. At the end of the discussion with Sarmad, we we'll have another look at upcoming meetings and any other business. In case anybody has anything, let us know, post in the chat what else. With that, a quick question to everybody whether there's been any updates

on the SOIs from everyone or anyone for that matter. I don't see that that may be the case.

Before passing it on to Sarmad, just a quick note. I recall, Anne, you asked the question at the end on .quebec, or you made a statement potentially referring to Council discussions. I suggest we keep that to the end. I think Sarmad has not a lot left in the document. Or at least we've gone through the bulk anyway. I suggest we'll let Sarmad walk us through the remainder of the document and then have an open discussion about the topic including .quebec or obviously any other questions that people might have. With that, I'll pass it on to Sarmad. Please take it away. Thank you.

SARMAD HUSSAIN: Thank you, Lars. Hello, good morning, good afternoon, good evening, everyone. We'll continue our review of the language for string similarity. We've gone through most of the document. Last time, we were, in a way, concluding discussion on 1.4.4. Just for those who, I guess, weren't there last time, we're really looking at the final section which is looking at the outcomes of the String Similarity Review. These are the decisions which the String Similarity Review Panel will do based on analysis of similarity between the applied-for strings and those strings which they need to be compared against. Those details are available in the Scope section.

We went through the possible outcomes. And the outcomes are that they are either deemed similar to one of the identified categories or in case of other applied-for strings similar or same. Or alternatively, they

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are not considered similar to any of the categories listed. Those are the potential outcomes. We were going through the details, I'm now going to skip 1.4.1 through 1.4.4 because those are what we already discussed last time.

Just to summarize 1.4.4, because that's what we concluded last time, was that when there is a requested IDN ccTLD string, it can come at any time during the gTLD Review process. We discussed that this language which is here has been imported from 2012 AGB round, which basically summarizes that in case the gTLD has completed its evaluation and is ready to be delegated, it will move forward. If the ccTLD has completed its evaluation and it's ready to be announced, it will move forward. In case none of them have successfully completed their evaluation then the gTLD will be put on hold until the ccTLD completes evaluation. And if ccTLD successfully completes evaluation, it will move forward. If the ccTLD application is withdrawn or does not prevail, then, of course, the gTLD evaluation can restart. In case the gTLD is rejected but don't have the relevant non-objection from the government authority against—in case it is competing against a ccTLD request, then only in that case this gTLD application fee will be refunded. I also shared that this was also raised with IDN EPDP as well, which is looking at string similarity right now. They may actually consider doing some more work in case it's needed on this area. Moving on. So this was just a summary of what we finished off with yesterday.

Then the next case is that if a string is applied for, it is found either identical or a variant of or similar to any of the other strings which have been applied for. In that case, there is potentially confusion or collision,

if you want to say that, in case both of them are same strings, and those will then eventually be put in contention set.

There's an interesting case here. If two strings are similar to each other, they go into what is called direct contention. But there's also this possibility of indirect contention. The reason for that is because string similarity is, in some cases, not really transitive in a true sense of the word. So if A is similar to B and B is similar to C, it is not always the case that A will be similar to C as well. So A and C, even though they're not similar, will end up in a contention set not because they're similar to each other but because each of them is similar to B. Therefore, that is what has been called the indirect contention here.

Interestingly, that indirect contention because of variants gets extended through the transitivity, not by just the string itself, but also its variants. What that means is that string A is confusable with string B's variant one and string B's variant two is confusing with string C. Even then, they will get into the same contention set because A is similar with the variant of B and so is C, even though A and C may not actually be similar. In both those cases…

First of all, I think what I wanted to point out was that the indirect contention actually gets extended from what it used to be in 2012 round two, now in two variants as well. Then the outcome, of course, is similar in the sense that if B prevails, then A and C get rejected. But if B does not prevail, then both A and C can proceed because they were really not similar to each other but they were in the same contention set because of B, not because of the similarity between A and C together. I hope that's clear and understandable. But this is obviously

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slightly complex level. Let me stop there and see if somebody has any questions about this. I don't see any hands or comments. So then let's keep moving on.

The next couple of cases are reasonably straightforward. If a string is similar to a reserved name or it is similar to any two-character ASCII combinations, which are reserved for ASCII ccTLDs, then the string will not proceed. Those are the last two conditions. 1.4.8 gives just a summary of what we've actually discussed in this section. It is actually saying that it's just trying to put all those different scenarios into this small chart so that the reader, the applicant can actually go through it and see what are all the possible options and how the results. So there is no new content here. It's just reorganized in perhaps a more readable manner. That actually brings us to the end of this document. Let me see if you have any comments or questions on this particular section 1.4.8. Otherwise, perhaps we can open the floor for more general discussion. And maybe I can hand it back to you, Lars. Thank you.

LARS HOFFMANN: Thank you, Sarmad. Just looking at the participants list, I don't see any hands up at the moment. Just letting Roger in to the room. Just some next steps, I know that Anne obviously wants to bring something up as well. Justine I see your hand. Just very quickly, after we reviewed the document here and answered any questions, we'll place it or remains in fact in the topic folder, allowing you to make comments on the document as you see fit. We probably will review the document in a week or so. Then if there's no major comments that warrant a revisit, we will make an update so they can get on list and then leave that in the

folder for people to view and put that eventually out for public comment. I see a list forming there, however. Sarmad, if you don't mind. I mean, I don't care. I'll moderate. Justine and then Susan. Thanks, Sarmad. Justine, please.

JUSTINE CHEW: Thank you, Lars. I hope I can be heard.

LARS HOFFMANN: Yes, very well.

JUSTINE CHEW: Great. Thank you. Sorry. I'm on two calls at the moment so it's really hard to straddle between the two. I don't know whether this is out of turn because I don't know what you're intending to do next. But a couple of things. One is, before I forget, Cheryl asked me to convey her apologies for this call so I just want to note it. I put something in the chat.

Second thing is I do like the way that the content has been laid out in the Table X under 1.4.8. I think it's something that I commented on in terms of visual aid from the last call. That's very helpful. Thank you for that.

My question really is aside from the ability to go in and study the document and maybe comment on whatever, which you have alluded to last, my question more is do we foresee a need to come back to this

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document further down the line after the outputs of the EPDP on IDNs have been either approved or not approved for whatever by the Board?

LARS HOFFMANN: Yes, absolutely, Justine. We will not put this out. We're going to put this topic potentially with others out for public comment, obviously, at some point, hopefully within the next year or so. As you recall, we want to put out different sections of the Applicant Guidebook as it become available as we've discussed them here in this group. This section here, Sarmad obviously noted that and it's a caveat at the top also for everybody who was not maybe on the last or the previous call before that. IDN EPP is ongoing. There are recommendations that come out of that potentially that may affect some of this and may require for us to change some of the language here based on the outcome of that. Sarmad has based the text here—Sarmad, correct me if I'm wrong—on this table recommendations where the IDN EPDP has reached essentially internal consensus of the direction they want to go on. But this text cannot be regarded as final until the EPDP is finalized. As you say, Justine, when that was the case, we revisit, update the document as appropriate, and then to then return, obviously, in this group before we then eventually put this document out for public comment.

Justine, absolutely, it has to be approved by the Board. I think the EPDP has some work still to go. We will only send this out for public comment once the Board has reviewed this. I think what we will do is that when the EPDP finishes and we see that the outcome is the same as what our assumptions were for this document, then there's probably no need to read this document. But obviously, there's updates being made because

of that. We'll do that maybe while the Board is considering, and then once the Board has adopted and no further changes take place, then we put this out for public comment.

I hope that makes sense. We're going to play it essentially a little bit by ear because we don't know when the PDP finishes, when the Board will resolve. And we want to be ready to have this finalized, really, at the moment that the Board has resolved in this.

JUSTINE CHEW:	If I can just respond. I understand where you're coming from and that's exactly what I was trying to point out. Nothing is concrete until the Board approves, and there's no guarantee that the Board is going to approve all the recommendations coming out of the EPDP on IDNs. So the question, basically, and I think you alluded to the answer, is that this particular document or this particular topic is going to be posted again or there is going to be an opportunity or there's going to be a need to revisit this at some point in time. Hopefully, post the Board approval of the recommendations from the EPDP. Thank you.

LARS HOFFMANN:	Thank you, Justine. Sarmad, is there anything you want to add to that?

SARMAD HUSSAIN:	No. I think you've covered that, Lars. I think one of the things we'll be looking at in addition to the feedback you provide now is whether any updated Phase 1 recommendations from IDN PDP have any impact on

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this. And if they do, we will certainly bring those into this document as well. Thank you.

LARS HOFFMANN: Thank you, Sarmad. I have Susan in the queue and then Anne.

SUSAN PAYNE: Thanks, Lars. Just a quick one. I think this was agreed on a previous call but I just wanted to confirm that there will be a global change to reference confusing similarity and not just similarity with the—because it isn't the case, simply that the string might be similar. It's a slightly higher bar than that and it should be confusingly similar. I think that's the case but I just wanted to confirm.

LARS HOFFMANN: Thanks for that, Susan. That is right. I think whether we're going to do change everything to confusingly similar or do a disclaimer at the top that's similar in the context of this topic, it means confusingly similar by the standard that applied last time as well. My personal preference would be to do a disclaimer at the top and use similar throughout, as I said, with the definition of the top. Because the topic and the panel, it's the String Similarity Panel and the string similarity evaluation rather than confusingly similar string similarity. Do you see where I'm going with this? But 100%, when we talk about similarity here, we mean confusingly similar as per the standard applied during the last round and during the next round it appears as well. Thanks. Sorry, again, Sarmad. I should have answered that.

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SARMAD HUSSAIN: All right. I just wanted to quickly come in to respond to that question. That in the last call, I think, the general agreement seemed to be confusingly similar to—we'll refer to it as Similar with a capital S and consistently do that in the whole document. We, of course, haven't made those changes. We're just go into the document. But all the comments you've shared with us over the last three calls, we will go back and address all of them and share the updated version once we close it, I guess, for comments from you. As Lars said, we'll still wait a week in case you have any other comments to share in the document, and then we'll take all of these on board and share a revised version with all of you. Thank you.

LARS HOFFMANN: Thanks, Sarmad. Anne, please.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE: Thank you very much. I put up my hand because I thought, "The queue's getting longer, I better jump in here." Just as you already know, Lars, the Council will be discussing diacritic characters in its meeting later today. On the accents and the diacritic characters, the last discussion at Council, it seemed to presume that, for example, in the case of .québec, with the accent over the first E, that would be an example of something that would come into String Similarity Review. And yet, I'm not sure by looking at this language if I would like to be able to get a handle on whether it would end up based on this [inaudible] chart in Table X in a String Similarity Review or not, how we think about the diacritic... I

mean, from French or many other languages, how we think about those at Council in terms of where identical strings other than the diacritic characters do or don't fall into the String Similarity Review process. That's not talking about outcomes, that's not talking about the determination made by the panel, it's talking about whether they are included in the review or not where diacritic characters are involved and the string is otherwise identical. It's a factual question, if you will.

LARS HOFFMANN: In this one, I'm not going to even attempt to an answer. I have some thoughts but Sarmad has an idea. Sarmad?

SARMAD HUSSAIN: Thank you. Basically, when there are two strings being applied in the new gTLD, they can fall in, potentially, four categories. They can be the same string, which means they're identical. They can be variants of each other, which is, by definition, I guess, through the variants are defined by the Root Zone Label Generation Rules. If Root Zone LGR says those two strings are variants, they're variants. If it says they're not, then they're not. That's the only mechanism we have. The third possibility is that those two strings could be similar. Then the fourth possibility is that they are not same, not variants, not similar, and so they're quite unique. Those are the four possible outcomes.

If you are looking at accented versus non-accented strings in Latin script, for example, if they are obviously not identical, one would have accent and one would not have accent. I'm not talking about just .quebec, but more generally. There are Latin Generation Panel and you

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can look at the solution for Latin script in the Root Zone LGR. It's determined that in some context in some characters with accents could be deemed variants and some are not deemed variants, and that's just Latin script community decision, and that's encoded in Root Zone LGR. So some of them could go there. I think if you're talking specifically about Quebec, it doesn't go into the variant set based on this Root Zone LGR. Then whether it will go into the third category or the fourth category, of course, that will be determined by the String Similarity to be panel. That, obviously, processes one cannot predict. It depends on two things. One, of course, is we talked about these String Similarity Review guidelines, which will set a larger kind of frame, and then specific comparisons within that frame will be taken up by the panel itself. I hope that perhaps addresses your questions, but I'm happy to add more to those.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE: Thank you, Sarmad. That's very, very helpful. Question, just a quick follow up, with respect to the Label Generation Rules, are all the strings reviewed by those Label Generation Panels, as part of the process of determining the similar sets, does that LGR process happen in a timeframe that is—sorry, go ahead.

SARMAD HUSSAIN: The LGR process is done. The Root Zone LGR process has been defined and it's been published. That part's already available to everyone. And I'll share the link in the chat shortly.

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ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE: So it's already completed. That means that when a string is applied for, it's either there's no new determination one way or the other? It's just—

SARMAD HUSSAIN: For variants. Yes. Not for similarity. Similarity is done by the panel. The variants are done by the Root Zone LGR.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE: So you're saying that, for example, if we look at .quebec as an example, that's easy for most people to follow, that it will either exist in the current LGR panel as a variant or it will not?

SARMAD HUSSAIN: Yes.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE: Okay. Thank you.

SARMAD HUSSAIN: That, we can note today. Thank you.

LARS HOFFMANN: Thank you both. I see Jason's hands up as well.

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JASON MERRITT:

Hi, everyone. Good morning. Thank you. Jason Merritt from GAC Canada here. While we're talking about this, obviously, this specific example of Quebec is of interest to us and I'm doing my best to track some of the ongoing discussions and policy work around this, albeit it is quite a comprehensive and difficult issue to get a grasp on. But I'm trying to marry these two things with this SubPro IRT Group that we're working on right now, and specifically working on the String Similarity guidelines for it simultaneously with trying to track some of the GNSO discussions that are going on with potentially how to address this issue. I'm trying to get a sense of where this is going for this Applicant Guidebook in terms of the actual .quebec issue or akin situations that could come up in the future that are the same.

So if I'm understanding how things are going in these two tracks, the GNSO Council is potentially looking at spinning up policy work to address this issue at some point in the near future, I think, if I'm getting the correspondence and some of the discussions correct. If that's correct, and additional policy work does take place on this issue, what is the likelihood that that gets resolved, so that language can be updated within this Applicant Guidebook and is available for the next round? I know it's a loaded question but I'm trying to track some of the complexities here.

Then I guess as a side question. Maybe it's just my kind of misunderstanding some of the discussions here, like within this IRT in this discussion around this specific chapter, this similarity, is there potential to craft language within this Applicant Guidebook that resolves the issue of .quebec or akin situations without having to spin up additional policy work? Maybe I'm thinking too practically there or

maybe I'm missing the concept of how these things are gated, but just some thoughts and more questions. I know that they're probably loaded and complicated, so I'm happy to take it offline or chat with people or see what the options are. Thanks.

LARS HOFFMANN: Thank you, Jason. Sarmad, I don't know if you want to take this. I can give it a stab as well. If you prefer for me to go first, if you want to cover it as well, I'm happy for you to.

SARMAD HUSSAIN: Go ahead, Lars. Thanks.

LARS HOFFMANN: Jason, a couple of hands go up. I'm going to give it a go. I suspect, especially Sebastien, Greg, you, obviously, may have some thoughts on this as well. So from our perspective, Jason, as you say, we're drafting the Applicant Guidebook for the next round. There is no policy. We can't make a policy in this group, right? Certainly, the Org can't do that. This group essentially can't either. So what we have are the recommendations from this recent Final Report, the 2021 Final Report and the 2007 Final Report. Yeah, there's no policy that would kind of allow for an exception for .quebec case to be treated essentially as a variant. If there is policy to be developed to be taken into account for this Applicant Guidebook, that obviously is absolutely a possibility, then this group would take it on. The only determinant factor is there other forces play a role here is the timeline when this could be concluded. So

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it can be included into this Applicant Guidebook without implications for the overall timeline. That's essentially questions that would concern the Board and the Council and forces certainly greater than the staff supporting this effort here. I hope that some useful information to start off with. Sarmad, please supplement. Otherwise, we have Greg and Sebastien in the queue as well.

SARMAD HUSSAIN: I don't have anything to add, I think. So we can go to Greg. Thanks.

LARS HOFFMANN: Thanks, Sarmad. Greg?

GREG SHATAN: Thanks. I'm glad to see that Sebastien has his hand up next. It's my understanding and looking at the variant. It's the Latin script variant list that was at the other end of the link that you put in, that .québec with an accent and .quebec without an accent are not considered variants so they're not considered confusingly similar. My father grew up in Montreal, so I have a somewhat of a vested interest in this. That is absurd. I don't know how this absurd result came about. Clearly, it's not something that we can change. So it will obviously have to be resolved in some other fashion. But it's sad, where we seem to be about this point. I know that there were objections within the group. It was not by any means a unanimous decision and ALAC objected to this result, but nonetheless, its stance. So if I've gotten any of the facts wrong, I apologize. But that's my understanding of the current outcome, which is

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completely inexplicable to me. But it seems that if it's not a variant, then it doesn't even count as being confusingly similar. So it doesn't even get be looked at in some other way. That's my understanding.

I believe that in the group, Bill Jouris was representing us and Bill did not believe that this was an appropriate outcome, to find that .québec and .quebec are not variants. Thanks.

LARS HOFFMANN: Thanks. Sebastien, I just want to briefly move Sarmad. I think there was one small kind of causal statement that Greg made that's not quite correct. Sarmad?

SARMAD HUSSAIN: Thank you. I just wanted to maybe add two points. First, for information, I guess, for everyone, the way the Latin solution, which I shared in the chat, and not just Latin but for all the other scripts, these LGRs were developed, were based on community input. They were actually community-based panels which ICANN was supporting, which were completely open. So anybody could join those panels and contribute to those panels. We at ICANN were making sure that that was the case.

They actually went through a very rigorous process, the Latin Generation Panel, for example, multiple years, it took them, I think, more than three to four years to come to a solution. There are certainly compromises or not compromises. But there were different positions in the group, and eventually they agreed to final position. But that's a

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position which eventually there was a Latin Generation Panels decision. Just to share that eventually this is not closed. The Generation Panels can revisit their solutions and update them. It's an ongoing process. We actually have aversion, but that's a decision the community needs to make.

The second thing which I want to share is that when we have to, of course, I just wanted to reiterate the two things, something which is variants and similarity are two distinct sort of processes here. Variants are determined by Root Zone LGR. And if something is a variant, then that's, of course, off the table, it's considered the same. But if something is not variant, then it is really up to the String Similarity Review Panel to decide if it is similar or not. I just wanted to clarify that those are two distinct processes. Thank you.

LARS HOFFMANN: Thanks. Sebastien, thanks so much for being patient. Over to you.

SEBASTIEN DUCOS: Good. Jason, I wanted to come back to your question vis-à-vis the GNSO. First of all, please appreciate there's a Frenchman and a lover of the [inaudible]. I'm absolutely interested in finding an outcome here. As you pointed at somebody else before, this is not a Quebec problem. This is an issue pretty much with any Latin language which has diacritic, and so accents and umlauts and others. And where the Root Zone LGR—for all the good reasons, I don't think that there is that much to be rediscussed about that—decided that there was no variation. It doesn't

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follow the definition of a variation like it would for Chinese language or Arabic or others that have variations.

There is a solution in the sense that whilst there is no mechanical algorithmic way of defining what would be a similar, confusingly or not, with similar strings that could be considered or operated as variants. There's no algorithm for that. That's exactly what the Root Zone LGR provided and we don't have it here. So that's where we need a panel to decide if they are or not. But there isn't solution, an outcome, that could be mirrored from the variants in the sense that we could say they are confusing similar, but if they're operated by the same operator, if they're operating on the same back end, if they're operating in parallel, all those conditions that are imposed on variants, we could consider that nobody's tripping each other. There's no confusion. It's just the same TLD with that accent or not. That requires policy as Lars said. I don't think that it needs a huge policy effort in the sense that the variants have found all the solutions to it. We have example from the ccTLDs that have used these sorts of solutions in non-variant similarities, particularly with .au. We could do all these things. But now when we started looking at in a different context, but in a context where we had closed many questions and many doors and we wanted to streamline a very short PDP, which is the case of the closed generics discussion that we'll have later, the shortest timeframe that we found for it was already beyond what we have now on a critical path, which is the IDN PDP. So there is no physical way. Even if we walk into a PDP that is completely agreed before we even start talking, there is no way to have this all done, finished, reported, and ready for implementation by the time the IDN PDP is finished. We have agreed within the GNSO that

the IDN EPDP is the last piece of work that is necessary—sorry, that will be [inaudible] part in the next round. Anything that comes beyond that will happen in the future round if they don't make it.

So I'm strongly in favor of starting this work as soon as possible, and I will discuss that with the GNSO. I'm about to step down as the GNSO chair and I will have a bit of time to run this if they're looking for somebody to lead it. I'm very interested to do it. But right now, as we've looked at it in a slightly different context, but the same problem of how long it takes for a PDP to go through and to end, we won't make the deadlines that are at this point required for the AGB.

Via the liaisons last week or the week before, what I was trying to flag is to try to get an understanding from this group, from the IRT, is how late can we come in with our homework done to fit it in the AGB. I assume the deadline to be somewhere around where the IDN EPDP will fall, which is in a year from now, and again, is very short for a PDP. Because I'm interested in indeed having it for the next round, it would simplify so many things, including the fact that if we miss the next round, then there's this whole question of what happens if somebody applies for .quebec that is not going to be the government of Quebec? Just for reference for everybody, the government of Quebec is not just going to apply for this TLD. And come what may, they will only apply if they have some guarantee that they will, in the end, if they obtain the TLD, governments can just play with public money and invest in things that they're not assured to obtain in the end. So, again, we're trying to go as fast as possible, but at this stage from all the analysis that we've done on other policy development projects, there is virtually no way to make this by the deadlines that we have, which are the IDN EPDP. Thanks.

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LARS HOFFMANN: Sorry, I'm just typing up a question in the chat. I apologize. Thank you, Sebastien. I have Jason and Anne in the line.

JASON MERRITT: I just wanted to quickly say thank you. I appreciate all that kind of feedback. Really, what it does for my mind is it confirms that at least I'm understanding the process and some of the complexities here properly. I think I understood that this is kind of been deemed as not an IDN issue and out of scope. The IDN Working Group has kind of flagged this as out of scope to address within that policy process, and that's where it's come to the string similarity problem, really. I would love to piggyback on Greg and beat a dead horse here. Apologies for the crass analogy that it is quite absurd that that's something like a French accent would not be considered a variant. I guess that's probably a failure of some of the discussions that were going on during the Root Zone Label discussions and maybe that's a lesson learned opportunity there. But I think coming full circle on this—and, Sebastien, thank you for chiming in on that—I think we would be keen to kind of see if this work could get spun up quick enough. I think you would probably get enough support in terms of how policy work could be done creatively to try to get a solution to this. I think the number of interested parties that are multilingual would pick up this issue as something that seems very common sense and that there are examples on how to craft policy probably very quickly around this, looking to how the CCs have done this, looking to some of borrowing some of the language and things like that within IDNs. I think there's a way to probably do this efficiently, if

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that's a thing. I think you would probably get a lot of buy-in especially given the global nature of this issue. It's kind of become labeled the .quebec issue, but really, I think it's a linguistic issue. And for ICANN to sort of be doubling down on UA and IDNs and multilingual Internet, I'm seeing this in many other global forums, I think you probably get some support to try to get this policy work done in a way where it could be implemented here.

I'm well aware of how kind of strapped in terms of ICANN staff and the ability to kind of spin policy work up is. That's not lost on me, the difficulties of doing that. But I think you might be able to get some support to carry some of this weight. So it might be worth kind of getting like a drop-dead date from this group in terms of this Applicant Guidebook if something could get implemented and when it could be in there. That might be helpful. Because my fear is—and maybe I don't know enough about the policy processes, I'm not sure if the Applicant Guidebook can be amended after the fact, if there's a process for that. Probably not, I'm assuming. But the last round was over a decade ago. I think it would be a severely missed opportunity to not include something like this for this round and kind of expect to wait X amount of years or decades before something like this the opportunity comes again. Thanks.

LARS HOFFMANN: Thank you, Jason. I don't know if there was a question in there, Jason, for us. But I think the only thing I would want to note is that, from a staff perspective, if there's a community effort underway to develop policy for the next round, I think we have a good track record. The

Board rather has a good track record to work with a small team very efficiently and effectively. So if there's any way that staff can support this, that policy, if there's in fact an effort to develop policy to kind of be flexible and hopefully not impact this timeline, then from our end, we'll do what we can and we'll work with the Board as best as we can to do that. But as Sebastien pointed out, obviously, timing here is probably a critical factor for the GNSO Council. Anne, your hand is up.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE: Thanks, Lars. I have two questions. First of all, thank you for allowing time for discussion of the issue for everyone to be able to weigh in on the processes that would be required. I wanted to ask, first of all, Greg Shatan put a question in chat saying, "Are you confirming that the String Similarity Panel could elect to include, just by way of example, .quebec with the accent over the first E in the review, even if it does not appear on the Label Generation Rules variant list? Are we confirming that the panel itself has the discretion as it reviews these strings?"

LARS HOFFMANN: The panel is independent. Yes is the answer.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE: It has the discretion.

LARS HOFFMANN: Absolutely, they can determine. The assessment of .québec and .quebec, the case without the accented E, is up to them.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE: But we're saying that if they're requiring them to include in the review process is a policy matter, I think is what we're saying. Second question has to do with, again, just the sort of the placeholder, but I guess that's already been asked and answered. At this point, we just need to have further discussion at Council how to how to address it. Thank you.

LARS HOFFMANN: Thank you, Anne. Just very quickly, it's eight minutes to the top of the hour, Justine is in the queue. The topic is, obviously, to interest to people. But I suggest we bring this to close after Justine's comment. Then if there's desire to discuss this, as you understand, not that this group is really chartered to discuss this, but maybe this is the closest there is, existing community groups to discuss this topic. Maybe we'll come back to it. But we can discuss that with Susan and Anne. Justine, please.

JUSTINE CHEW: Thanks, Lars. I think I heard something that Anne said, which I want to clarify or correct. My understanding is that the String Similarity Panel looks at every string that is applied for. So it's not a question of choice. It's a question of, they will look at every string that's applied for but they determine whether certain strings are confusingly similar or not. That is separate to the RZ-LGR which determines whether two strings are variants of each other or not. So the two string similarity and variants are two different concepts. If the two strings are variants of each other, then only one party if the recommendations from the IDNs

EPDP goes through. If two strings are variants of each other, then they have to go with one party, they cannot be split. If the strings are similarly confusing, then only one can be delegated, the other cannot be delegated. So that's the difference. I forgot my other point. But yeah, never mind. Thank you.

Oh, sorry. Sorry, I just remembered my other point. Just quickly. I think we are concentrating too much on Quebec, and I think there's a danger in that. Because Philippe pointed out in chat that it's not just about Quebec and we shouldn't be looking in isolation of Quebec. We don't want to be making any exceptions or policies that only address one incident. We need to be careful to make policy that doesn't end up making difficulties for other things. Philippe pointed out that it's not always the case that a word with or without accent is the same. There are incidences where they actually two different words. So you can't necessarily take the general conclusion that anything with an accent or anything without accent are always the same word. That's what I feel about concentrating just on Quebec. Thank you.

LARS HOFFMANN: Interesting. Anne? Then I'm going to close the queue with five minutes to go. Anne, please.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE: Thanks, Lars. Certainly, I think Justine's point is well taken. The other thing that I wanted to ask about was the response you gave in chat about a determination that two strings are confusingly similar would mean that the second string cannot be awarded at all. I had thought

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that in the AGB and I thought it was 1.4.1 that it said that if the previously existing TLD is the operator of the second applied-for string that is determined to be confusingly similar, that there can be an award to that first operator of that string if it's not otherwise in contention.

LARS HOFFMANN: I'll let Sarmad answer that, Anne. But I don't think that is correct. I believe as soon as there's a string similarity between the existing string and an applicant, the applicant string cannot proceed.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE: Even if it's the same party? So what you're saying is—

LARS HOFFMANN: Sarmad will be able to answer this, but I think in the CC world, this is possible, not in the gTLD world. Sarmad?

SARMAD HUSSAIN: Yes. Currently the Policy SubPro and IDN EPDP, they don't have any such provision, that if two strings are found similar and they're not variants, then they can still proceed. Only one of them can proceed even if those strings are applied by the same applicant. Thanks.

ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE: So that's a very important distinction. In other words, the second application would have to be determined to be a variant by the LGR panel before it could be awarded to the original applicant, who has the

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identical string but without the diacritic character. If it's not a variant, it cannot be awarded to the original, the first operator who has the string without the diacritic character. It must be determined to be a variant in order for that operator to. And see how I'm carefully avoiding talking about that .quebec, but what you're telling me is that in that in .quebec, unless the Québec with the accent is determined to be a variant, that .quebec cannot operate and be awarded the version with the accent because it's not a variant.

LARS HOFFMANN: Two minutes ago, Justine said the same thing. Justine I think went into this a second ago. I'll try one more time. Got to look at the time. So my understanding is that .quebec and .québec with the accent, because of the decision of the Root Zone LGR, are not variants. If they were variants or if there's a future application and there's a variant of an existing TLD, they operate by the same operator, they can proceed if they're variants of one another. That's perfectly fine. We already know that .quebec and .québec are not variants. That's decided under the current rules. Those could be changed. But at the moment, they're not variants. So if there was an application that comes in, as any application, whether it's .quebec or .example, it will go to string similarity. If it's found confusingly similar with any existing string, then it cannot proceed. If it's found not to be confusingly similar, then it can proceed. So in other words, if .québec with the accent were to be found not confusingly similar with .quebec without the accent, it can actually proceed. And it doesn't have to be the same operator under the current rules. If the latter were to change, that requires policy work, the former about the Root Zone LGR, that does not require policy work.

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ANNE AIKMAN-SCALESE: Okay. Well, thank you, Lars. That's very helpful. These clarifications are important to the discussion in Council today. So many thanks for taking the time.

LARS HOFFMANN: Of course. Very quickly, Elisa, if you could go to the slide for the next meetings. I apologize about this in advance. We have moved the Reserved Names topic to the discussion on Tuesday. It's being presented by Michael. He's presenting it for the first time and he's based in L.A. We've had a lot of call to 13:00 UTC. So I asked Elisa to move the time for the Tuesday meeting to 20:00 UTC. We hadn't had that slot in a while, give the Americans a bit more of a morning, especially those on the West Coast and the Europeans. In Asia I think it's going to be very early morning, maybe more of a night and late night shift. I hope that's okay. I've got another friend coming in here. So before he interrupts, I'll close the call. Elisa will update the invitation after this call.

With that, thank you, everyone. I think it's a very productive call. Sarmad will post the document. We reiterate that it's out for comment. We'll close the document and lock it next week. Sarmad will do update and recirculate on the list, and then we'll determine whether we have to have another go or not. With that, please end the recording. Everybody have a lovely rest of your day/evening. Thank you.

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