

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT

**by the Head of the Delegation of the Republic of Bulgaria
at the consideration by the Committee on Economic, Social and
Cultural Rights of the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports
of the Republic of Bulgaria submitted under Articles 16 and 17 of
the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural
Rights**

Geneva, 20 November 2012

**Distinguished Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Committee Members,**

It is an honour for me to be in the historic Palais Wilson today and on behalf of the Bulgarian Government to present to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights the combined Fourth and Fifth periodic report of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Bulgaria considers the advancement of universal human rights and fundamental freedoms as a core value of our domestic and foreign policy. In this context we believe that the review of our periodic report today will contribute to strengthening our national human rights record.

Mr. Chairman,

In view of the fact that more than 3 years have passed since our report was submitted, in this statement I would like to highlight *the progress achieved since 2009 in Bulgaria's legislation and policies*, relevant to the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the challenges which we need to address further.

Bulgaria is Party to the core international human rights treaties and has accepted the most far-reaching scrutiny of its human rights record.

At national level, the process of improvement continues, both in legislation and implementation aimed at further enhancing implementation of the provisions of the Covenant.

Bulgaria cooperates closely with the UN treaty bodies in the field of human rights and over the past several years has submitted consolidated versions of all its pending reports.

In November 2011 the UN Human Rights Council considered the first Universal Periodic Review of Bulgaria. Practically all recommendations made were accepted by my country, which is now preparing for a midterm review next year.

Allow me to draw your attention to a number of developments, which have followed after 2009, namely *accessions and ratifications of major international instruments, relevant to the competences of this Committee:*

- In January 2012 Bulgaria acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the UN Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons, and the UN Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

- In the period 2009-2011 Bulgaria has ratified several important ILO conventions, namely ILO Convention No. 177 Home Work Convention, 1996, ILO Convention No. 161 Occupation Health Service Convention, 1985 and ILO Maritime Labour Convention, 2006.

- In 2011 the Ombudsman and the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, as national human rights institutions, have formally undertaken the requisite steps before the International Coordination Committee of the National Institution for Protection of Human Rights for

accreditation in accordance with the Paris Principles and have attributed status “B”.

I will proceed with some of the *legislative and regulatory developments* in Bulgaria relevant to the scope of the Covenant, which have taken place over the past 3 years:

- In 2010, amendments were introduced to the Integration of Persons with Disabilities Act, establishing a National Council on Integration of Persons with Disabilities and broadening the scope of functions of the Agency on Persons with Disabilities;

- In 2012 Protection against Discrimination Act was amended, providing as an absolute requirement all draft laws to be reviewed in advance by the Commission for Protection against Discrimination in order to avoid any contradictions with the non-discrimination standards.

- In 2010 and 2011, amendments were introduced to the Healthy and Safety Labour Conditions at Work Act, requiring strict measures by employers to decrease the risk for the health and safety of workers and related persons;

- In 2011 amendments were introduced to the Penal Code to strengthen the response to hate speech and hate crimes by adding new grounds of discrimination and specifically criminalizing public incitement to violence or hate on ethnic grounds;

- In 2011, the Government transferred responsibility for all consultation and coordination activities related to ethnic and integration issues to the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues at the Council of Ministers. The Government broadened the mandate of the Council as to interaction with international institutions and the coordination of the international initiative “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015”.

- In 2012 amendments were introduced to the Health Act prohibiting smoking indoor in public places and certain outdoor public places;

Just a few days ago new drafts for a National Strategy on Reduction of Poverty and Promotion of Social Inclusion 2020 and a National Strategy for Long-term Care were launched for public discussion.

The national policy in the area of *gender equality* guarantees equal access to the labour market and economic activities, suitable measures for combining professional and family life. Particular attention is paid in the areas of education, healthcare and preventing domestic violence.

The National Council on Gender Equality at the Council of Ministers coordinates all activities of ministries, agencies and NGOs in this domain. The implementation of the National Strategy for Promotion of Gender Equality for 2009–2015 and the relevant annual action plans are at the core of the national gender equality policy in conformity with the European Strategy for Gender Equality 2010-2015, the Europe 2020 Strategy, and the draft of the new European Pact for Gender Equality.

Bulgaria's policy regarding *persons with disabilities* is aimed at improving the quality of life of people with disabilities, non-discrimination, ensuring equal opportunities as well as full and active inclusion in society. An expression of the commitment of the Republic of Bulgaria to the rights of disabled persons was the ratification by the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 26 January 2012 and the entry into force of the Convention for the Republic of Bulgaria on 22 March 2012.

The policy for integration of people with disabilities is guided by the Integration of Disabled People Act and the Strategy for Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities 2008 – 2015, adopted by the Council of Ministers in 2007. A number of measures in this direction merit special attention:

- Under the National Programme for Employment and Vocational Training of People with Permanent Disabilities special employment and training measures are carried out.

- The Law on Civil Servants has been amended to include the establishment of a quota for recruitment of people with disabilities as civil servants in the administration.

- In compliance with the policy to reintegrate children from existing auxiliary schools, Comprehensive Pedagogical Assessment Teams were established in general education and vocational schools to assess the educational needs of disabled children in order to integrate them in the school system.

Let me also provide you with an update of most recent developments in respect of the situation of the **Roma** in Bulgaria:

The National Roma Integration Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2012-2020 incorporates the objectives and principles of the Strategy for Educational Integration of Children and Students belonging to Ethnic Minorities, the Health Strategy for Disadvantaged Ethnic Minorities and the National Programme for Improving Housing Conditions of Roma. The Strategy covers six priority areas of the integration policy, namely: education, health, housing, employment, rule of law and non-discrimination, culture and media. The last two priorities are specific for Bulgaria.

The implementation of the Action Plan of the Strategy is envisaged in two periods: 2012-2014 and until 2020. The

Action Plan is developed as an open document that will be updated on the basis of regular analysis.

However, an effective and comprehensive solution to the problem of Roma integration requires further coherent efforts from all stakeholders - state institutions, local authorities, civil society and the Roma people themselves.

With respect to policies towards the *elderly people*, the Bulgarian Government continues to expand its programmes of providing long-term care services and support to them in order to live a life of dignity after retirement.

The Bulgarian long-term care and social services system was significantly broadened over recent years resulting from actions aiming at deinstitutionalization and expanding the scope of community and home based services.

The transition from conventional institutionalized care to community-based and residential type of services is progressing through extending the range of services to include day centres, social rehabilitation and integration centres, protected homes, supervised homes, family-type centres.

The National Health Strategy 2008 - 2013, and the Action Plan related thereto, emphasize the significance of ensuring aged people equitable access to health services and providing them with nursing and midwifery health structures.

The policy of the Government is that obsolete *child-care institutions* must be closed by 2015, and replaced by a network of community-based services providing friendly and family-based environment. Priority in this process is given to the closure of institutions for children with disabilities and of the medical and social care homes for children up to 3 years old. In the past 5 years thanks to government measures and civil society action, the conditions in state and municipal

child-care institutions have improved significantly. Bulgaria is the host of a UNICEF Regional Ministerial Conference opening tomorrow in Sofia under the heading : “Ending the placement of children under three in institutions: Support nurturing families for all young children”.

Mr. Chairman,

We realize that Bulgaria should continue its efforts aimed at guaranteeing economic and social rights and better living and working conditions for its citizens. In its economic and social policy Bulgaria had to cope with the adverse impact of the global financial and economic crisis since 2008 and the constraints of economic recession and the internationally predominant austerity policies. In this difficult international environment the Bulgarian government has worked responsibly for the protection of economic, social and cultural rights and for alleviating the social cost of the crisis on most vulnerable society groups.

We trust that our interactive session today will contribute to better understanding of both our achievements and remaining challenges. We look forward to your questions and to a fruitful discussion.

Thank you!