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## مجلس حقوق الإنسان

الدورة التاسعة عشرة

البند ٣ من جدول الأعمال

تعزيز وحماية جميع حقوق الإنسان، المدنية والسياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية والثقافية، بما في ذلك الحق في التنمية

### مذكرة شفوية مؤرخة ١٥ آذار/مارس ٢٠١٢ موجهة إلى أمانة مجلس حقوق الإنسان من البعثة الدائمة لبلغاريا لدى مكتب الأمم المتحدة وسائر المنظمات الدولية في جنيف

تهدي البعثة الدائمة لجمهورية بلغاريا لدى مكتب الأمم المتحدة وسائر المنظمات الدولية في جنيف تحياتها إلى أمانة مجلس حقوق الإنسان وتتشرف بأن ترفق طيه نسخة من تعليقات السلطات البلغارية على تقرير الخبرة المستقلة المعنية بقضايا الأقليات عن زيارتها إلى بلغاريا في الفترة من ٤ إلى ١١ تموز/يوليو ٢٠١١ (A/HRC/19/56/Add.2)\*.

وستكون البعثة الدائمة في غاية الامتنان إذا تفضلت الأمانة بتعميم هذه المذكرة الشفوية ومرفقها بوصفها وثيقة من وثائق الدورة التاسعة عشرة لمجلس حقوق الإنسان في إطار البند ٣ من جدول الأعمال.

\* مستنسخة في المرفق كما وردت وباللغة التي قُدمت بها فقط.

## Annex

### **Comments by the Bulgarian authorities on the report of the UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues, Ms. Gay McDougall, following her visit in Bulgaria (4-11 July 2011)**

The Bulgarian authorities highly value the constructive cooperation with the Special Procedures' mandate holders. That is why the Government has extended a standing invitation to all Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council to visit Bulgaria.

The visit of the UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues took place on 4-11 July 2011, and was hosted by the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues to the Council of Ministers – the main body at the national level for consultation and cooperation of the Government with associations of persons belonging to minorities and other relevant non-governmental organizations. In April 2011, its scope was broadened to include also representatives of the local authorities.

The programme of the visit was prepared in close coordination with the Independent Expert who received full and unhindered access to all places and organizations she took interest in. In the course of the visit, the competent authorities provided various copies of documents to the Independent Experts, aiming at better understanding both the realities in the country and the policy of the Government for protection of the rights of persons belonging to minorities groups in Bulgaria. In addition, the Bulgarian authorities have availed themselves of the opportunities to comment on the press statement and the initial draft of the report prepared by the Independent expert.

The Bulgarian authorities regret that only part of their comments were given due consideration by the Independent Expert and that the latter had decided to retain in her report numerous inaccuracies misrepresenting the real situation in Bulgaria with respect to the rights of persons belonging to minority groups – both in terms of the ethnic diversity which exists in the country and with regard to the model of inter-ethnic relations which was successfully established in Bulgaria during the last 20 years. This model is based on the values of pluralistic democracy and in concord with the principles of non-discrimination and voluntary integration of persons belonging to minorities.

Furthermore, there is no clear distinction drawn in the report between facts established or confirmed by the Independent Expert and the various allegations made by anonymous sources repeatedly quoted in the text as a single person's subjective perception of reality. This deprives the reader of the opportunity to form his/her own judgment about the credibility of these statements which, unfortunately, seriously distort the reality of the situation in Bulgaria.

In light of the above, the Bulgarian authorities would like to submit the following comments on the issues raised in the report:

1. Bulgaria is a State party to the core international instruments in the field of human rights, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention (No. 111) concerning Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation, the Convention against Discrimination in Education and the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. These international legal instruments are an integral part of the national legislation.

In addition, as a member State of regional organizations like the Council of Europe and the European Union, Bulgaria is also a party to other relevant instruments, such as the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Racial Equality Directive, etc.

Notably, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe (the Framework Convention) was signed by Bulgaria in 1998 and ratified in 1999. Since then, the provisions of the Framework Convention have been applied by the Bulgarian authorities in good faith.

2. The Constitution of Bulgaria expressly recognizes the existence of ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity in the country. The richness of this diversity is registered during the regular population censuses conducted by the National Statistical Institute (NSI), in full conformity with the highest international standards in this field.

The methodology of the censuses relating to ethnic-demographic indicators is based solely on the free expression of the will of the individual. The data gathered during the last census in February 2011 show that more than 10 ethnicities co-exist peacefully in Bulgaria, including Turks, Roma, Armenians, Jews, Wallachians, Romanians, Ukrainians, Greeks, Karakachani, etc. These facts do not require any additional recognition.

In preparation for the census, the NSI carried out extensive consultations with representatives of the Roma community in particular. The issue was discussed both by the Commission on Integration of Roma in the Bulgarian society and the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues. Persons of Roma origin were included among the counting personnel.

The census results show a demographic drop among all ethnicities in Bulgaria, including the Bulgarian ethnic group.

With regard to the Roma in particular, one possible explanation of the discrepancy between the official census results and the figures of non-governmental sources is the fact that the Roma, as the other ethnic groups in Bulgaria, are also influenced by the migration trends within the EU, and this will probably become visible when all EU member states complete their censuses.

Another possible explanation is the fact that non-governmental organizations often use data collected during their project work at municipal level. Such an approach, however, does not take into account the process of internal migration which has affected many strata in the Bulgarian society. Registration with various municipal bodies, often linked to receiving social benefits, is relevant only for a certain period of time, as some prefer to move and re-register at another place of residence afterwards. Obviously, the automatic accumulation of such statistics could hardly be regarded as reliable as the official census conducted in conformity of the UN standards.

3. In addition to censuses, personal data, related to ethnic or religious affiliation, could be collected only on voluntary basis by the NSI.

The relevant administrative bodies avail themselves of expert estimates or data from their own administrative sources, with a view to analyse the impact of the respective governmental policies on the population.

There are also specific indicators linked to statistical data collection within the national monitoring mechanisms, for example the mechanism for the implementation of the National Action Plan on the Decade on Roma Inclusion, 2005-2015. In 2010, in the process of the overall review and update of the governmental strategic documents on fostering the equal integration of Roma in the Bulgarian society, the Ministry of Labour and Social

Policy initiated the elaboration, together with the Open Society Institute, of a specific methodology for data collection.

In 2011, the NSI and the NCCEII participated in discussions with the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) on data collection, in accordance with the FRA mandate to develop methods and standards to improve the comparability, objectivity and reliability of data at EU level.

4. Bulgaria shares the generally accepted concept that the rights of persons belonging to different ethnic, religious or linguistic groups are an integral part of the overall complex of rights and fundamental freedoms. Ethnic and cultural diversity in Bulgarian society is regarded as a wealth and an important resource for the development of the Bulgarian civic nation.

Persons belonging to minority groups play an active role in the political and public life of the country. The Movement for Rights and Freedoms, perceived as representing mainly the interests of persons of Turkish origin, has been a well established political entity both at national and local level and its representatives have been successfully participating in elections to the National Assembly and to local government.

At the local level, persons belonging to minority groups, including Roma, have been elected as mayors or municipal councilors. Generally, during the latest parliamentary and local elections, the mainstream political parties have shown greater interest in issues pertaining to problems of persons belonging to minority groups and have put their representatives as candidates on the respective party lists.

Regarding the right of persons belonging to minority groups to receive education in their mother tongue, it is duly regulated in the Bulgarian legislation (Article 8 (2) of the Law on Public Education and Article 5 (2) of Regulation № 2/18.05.2009 of the Minister of Education and Science). Mother tongue education is provided in municipal schools, and is financed through municipal budgets. The text books are free of charge. Mother tongue can also be taught in private schools.

The 2004 Strategy for the Educational Integration of Children and Pupils belonging to Ethnic Minorities has developed additional initiatives for the study of the mother tongue: Romani, Turkish, Armenian and Hebrew are now part of the curriculum, additional mother tongue experts have been recruited, special training for teachers in Romani have been established, additional textbooks and grammars in minority mother tongues have been published. These facts have been duly noted by international monitoring mechanisms in the field of minority rights, including the Advisory Committee to the Framework Convention on Protection of National Minorities of the Council of Europe.

Turkish is being studied as a mother tongue both in municipal and private schools. There are experts in the Turkish language employed by the regional Inspectorates of Education, to meet the needs of regions with big numbers of pupils studying Turkish. It is also studied in the "Balkan Schools" of the private Balkan College Foundation, and in the private "Druzha" ("Friendship) secondary school of the Bulgarian-Turkish Democratic Foundation. The "Konstantin Preslavski" University in Shumen and the Pedagogical College in Kurdjali train teachers in the Turkish language. It is also one of the subjects studied in the "St. Kliment Ohridski" University and the Higher Islamic Institute in Sofia. There are also special courses organized for teachers in the Republic of Turkey.

Armenian, Hebrew and Greek are studied as mother tongues in Bulgarian schools in Sofia, Plovdiv, Sliven and in other cities and towns. There are two municipal schools in Sofia where about 750 pupils of Armenian origin study Armenian four hours per week. In Plovdiv, there are about 350 pupils of Armenian origin studying Armenian. Armenian is also taught and studied in other cities by groups of pupils attending Saturday and Sunday

schools. Romanian is studied in the specialized senior high-school in Sofia. Two-thirds of the pupils are of Vlah or Romanian origin. The rest study Romanian as a foreign language.

There is a Jewish school, the “Dimcho Debelyanov”, in Sofia, where one third of the pupils are Jewish and the rest Bulgarian. There are also “Sunday schools” in Sofia, Ruse, Vidin, Plovdiv, Bourgas and Kyustendil where Hebrew is taught.

Teaching Romani began in some municipal schools in 1992.

Furthermore, conditions have been created to promote the cultural identity of persons belonging to minority groups and the manifestations of cultural diversity. The Ministry of Culture and the NCCEII support traditional cultural events and specific projects, such as fairs, participation of song-and-dance troupes in national or foreign festivals, book promotions, celebration of calendar holidays, exhibitions, etc.

In addition, Bulgaria has been cooperating closely with its neighbours in the field of culture, education and science and fostering trans-border cooperation, including in the framework of Euro-regions. This has paved the way for joint initiatives in the economic, social and cultural field, including to the benefit of persons belonging to minority groups.

5. The legal framework of Bulgaria for protection against discrimination, including on ethnic or religious grounds, is fully in line with the international legal obligations of the country. The Law on Protection against Discrimination which has been in force since 2003 provides for additional guarantees of the right to equality and mechanisms for protection.

The victims of alleged discrimination have the alternative to submit a complaint before the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (CPD) or before the court. The CPD is an established anti-discrimination body, which cooperates closely with civil society and the media, carries out trainings, surveys, organized awareness raising campaigns, etc. During the years, the CPD has established partnerships with many public institutions and has developed a wide network of 18 local branches covering the whole territory of Bulgaria.

6. No country is immune to hate crimes. However, in performing its supervisory activities, the Prosecutor’s Office has confirmed that in Bulgaria, any such incidents remain isolated cases.

Furthermore, the Prosecutor’s Office always conducts investigations, including all racially motivated incidents, taking into consideration cumulatively the social danger of the act itself, of the perpetrators and their motives, causes and modus operandi. Inquiries are conducted also in all cases involving alleged violations of the law by police officers. Where such violations are proved, their perpetrators and, where necessary, their immediate superiors, too, are sanctioned.

In 2011, the Prosecutor General has explicitly pointed out the need of strict compliance with the special provisions on “hate crimes” laid down in the Penal Code, namely Articles 162 and 163 whose scope was extended (in force since 27.05.2011). The penal sanctions for offences against national and racial equality show that the legislator treats these offences as presenting a high degree of social danger - with the amendments to the Penal Code in 2010, incitement to ethnic hostility or hatred (in speech, print or other mass media, through electronic information systems or through other means) was added to the provision on propaganda of, and incitement to, racial or national hostility or hatred or to racial discrimination, and the penalty was also increased to imprisonment of up to four years and a maximum fine was increased to 10 000 BGN.

In addition, for several years now, the Ministry of Interior has been implementing the Strategy “Police near the community” which contains as its substantial part activities aimed at raising awareness of citizens, belonging to ethnic minority groups, of the work of

the police and at the same time – the improvement of the skills of police officers, working in areas with predominant number of people belonging to ethnic minorities. Moreover, since 2010, the Ministry of Interior has been implementing the Training against Hate Crimes for Law Enforcement programme (TAHCLE), on the basis of a memorandum of understanding with the OSCE/ODIHR. In accordance with the Law on Radio and Television, the Council for Electronic Media (CEM) has also been exercising rigorously its powers and, whenever necessary, issues imperative requirements for non-admission of broadcasts, inciting national, political, ethnic, religious and racial intolerance by the providers of media services in the territory of Bulgaria. CEM will continue to initiate public and professional debate on preventing and combating hate speech in the media and politics.

Specifically on combating hate speech against Roma in the media, it should be mentioned that the Bulgarian Government has co-financed the Public Roma Debate – an event co-sponsored by the NCCEII, the Open Society Institute, the National Association “Debates”, the newspaper “Drom Dromendar” and the “Red house” - Center for culture and debates. In this unique format, two teams, both of them composed of young Roma - university students of philosophy, law, medicine, public administration, business, etc. – held a debate. They explored together how hate speech in the media affected the equal participation of Roma in public life, how should the Roma take more responsibility for their own fate, and how hate speech could be transformed into the speech of change.

7. The Bulgarian Government confirms once again its political will for the improvement of the situation of Roma, while also fully acknowledging that there could be no simple or quick solution of these issues. The full-fledged integration of Roma is a matter of enhancing social inclusion and fair distribution of the burden of responsibilities. Achieving satisfactory results could be only a product of a shared effort and proportional responsibility between the Government, the Roma communities and their leaders, and of the NGOs involved in the Roma integration.

The Bulgarian authorities are convinced that this approach does bring progress, which has been recognized, inter alia, by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, in its recent Resolution on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by Bulgaria which states that “Bulgaria has developed a number of programmes focused on the priority areas of education, employment, health care, housing, poverty reduction, discrimination and gender equality, which have improved the socio-economic status and social inclusion of Roma in the society.”

In this context, the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion (2012-2020) elaborated in line with the requirements of the European Commission, adopted by the Government on 5 January 2012 and endorsed by the Parliament on 1 March 2012, is an omnibus document, strengthening the comprehensive approach of the whole package of documents that exist in this area (such as the Framework Programme for Integration of Roma in the Bulgarian Society, 2010-2020, the National Action Plan for the Decade on Roma Inclusion, 2005-2015, the Educational Strategy for Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities, the National Programme for Improving the Housing Conditions of Roma, 2006-2015, the Health Strategy for Disadvantaged Persons belonging to minorities, etc.).

The document was prepared through a process of genuine and large scale participation of Roma representatives, through the mechanisms of the Commission on Roma Integration at the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues. The draft was discussed first in working groups focusing specifically on measures in six priority areas – education, employment, health, housing, rule of law and non-discrimination, culture and media. Later, discussions were held by the local council for cooperation on ethnic and demographic issues at the various municipalities in Bulgaria. Finally, a national public presentation was organized, with the participation of relevant ministries, NGOs,

including Roma representatives, researchers and academicians, and representatives of international organizations.

The National Strategy is supplemented by an Action Plan which covers as the first phase of its implementation the measures already approved within the framework of the Decade for Roma Inclusion, 2005-2015. The planning for the second phase (2015-2020) takes into account the Strategy “Europe 2020” approved by the European Council in June 2010. 2015 is envisaged as a mid-term year when the effectiveness of the measures applied within the Decade for Roma Inclusion, 2005-2015, will be analysed and eventually updated.

It should also be pointed out that, at municipal level, all decisions pertaining to the situation of Roma, including their housing conditions, are discussed regularly with Roma representatives within the Municipal Councils on Roma Integration.

Regarding housing, local authorities in Bulgaria have been implementing urban regulation of residential areas with predominant Roma populations with a view to including new zones for housing development. Funds from the state budget have been allocated for improving the existing and developing new infrastructure in Roma residential areas. Considerable funds are being invested in the rehabilitation and construction of roads, water supply and sewage, including in areas with compact Roma population.

In 2011, 16 million BGN have been allocated particularly for construction of municipal social housing. All municipalities in Bulgaria have been given the opportunity to present specific projects. Finally, the projects submitted by four municipalities have been endorsed and will be financed – Dupnitsa (5 million BGN), Devnya (1,3 million BGN), Burgas (5 million BGN), and Vidin (5 million BGN). Projects of four other municipalities compete for the spare funds.

Referring to evictions, the Bulgarian authorities have already given due explanations on numerous occasions. In this context, it should be stressed that the eviction in 2009 of the persons illegally settled the district of Gorno Ezerovo (Bourgas) took place in full compliance with national legislation. The persons concerned had been properly informed at a very early stage. The proceedings themselves lasted for several years and those, eligible by the law, have been offered opportunities for alternative housing. The Mayor of Bourgas organized a special discussion aimed at identifying specific additional measures, including granting construction permits to persons who have lived for more than 20 years on municipal property. Such an approach, however, cannot be applicable to illegal inhabitants who have address registration in other municipalities.

In the area of education, it should be stressed that each pupil or student in Bulgaria receives free of charge textbooks and all required additional material both for pre-school education in public kindergartens and for I to VIII school grades. This is provided for by Decree No. 104 of the Council of Ministers of 10 May 2003. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science provides also free transportation for children, including of Roma origin, when they are enrolled in schools outside their residential area.

In this regard, the Bulgarian authorities would like to draw attention to the conclusions adopted by European Commission on Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on 5 December 2011, and particularly to the fact that ECRI “notes with satisfaction” the measures undertaken by the Bulgarian authorities to intensify the educational integration of Roma children.

The comparative analysis of the new data against the results of the census held ten years ago does show some progress – the percentage of Roma who have not completed elementary school dropped by 1.4 points, and the percentage of those with secondary education and university degree increased by 2.5 and 0.3 points respectively. This

reinforces the commitment of the Bulgarian Government to continue with its efforts taking advantage also of the lessons learnt in the past 20 years.

One of the good examples in this regard is the Social Inclusion Project which has been under implementation since 2010, and is financed with a 40 million EUR loan by the World Bank. It aims at developing a network of social services to children from economically disadvantaged families, including from Roma origin, thus elevating the quality of child care and encouraging the inclusion of children in programmes for early pre-school education. As of January 2012, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science has signed agreements with 59 municipalities for financing specific projects at local level. 10 more municipalities are invited to join.

Since 2010, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science has been implementing a Project "Support for a Full-Day Education of Children in Primary Schools" which provides opportunity for pupils from ethnic minorities to improve their skills in Bulgarian language as well as their communication abilities which should lead to better results in school. In 2011, specific projects to this aim have been financed in 88 schools.

All measures of the Bulgarian authorities aimed at increasing the quality of education are regularly discussed with relevant NGOs. The funds in the 2012-2013 state budget for these activities amount to 6 Million BGN.

Furthermore, since 2009, programmes have been developed, together with the State Agency for Child Protection, for pupils and students in risk of dropping out from school. They are implemented in cooperation with the regional inspectorates of education, the municipalities, the school boards and other bodies and organizations. The funds allocated in the 2012-2013 state budget amount to 7 Million BGN.

In addition, the Centre for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities (whose budget for 2012-2013 is 7, 43 Million BGN) cooperates with the Roma Education Fund in Budapest and co-finances specific projects encouraging the integration of Roma children in mainstream education and preventing early drop-outs. Additional 7 Million BGN are envisaged for the reintegration of dropped out pupils and students back in the educational system.

The 2010 National Classification of Occupations and Duties includes the position "assistant teacher" developed by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science back in 2003 following a proposal of Roma non-governmental organizations. The assistant teachers facilitate the integration of children and students belonging to the ethnic minority groups, including Roma children, thereby supporting the access to education. The monitoring during 2011 of the projects involving assistant teachers has shown notable benefits for the trainees, in particular in an ethnically mixed educational environment.

Since 2010, each school in the country is obliged to draw up an annual plan which is submitted to the Regional Inspectorates of Education and the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science. The Regional Inspectorates of Education have designated experts and tasked them with obligations on the integration of children and students belonging to the ethnic minorities. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science has carried out instruction of all directors of all schools and kindergartens in the country in accordance with requirements of the Law on Protection against Discrimination. Currently, the Regional Inspectorates on Education require that the obligation to prevent any form of discrimination is included in the job description of all teaching personnel.

Regarding the information on Pazardjik, the authorities have confirmed that Roma and non-Roma children are, indeed, equally represented in the two secondary schools in the city, "Hristo Botev" and "Stefan Zahariev", and that there are no institutional or other barriers for the Roma children to enroll or receive help, if needed, to master their skills in

school. It should be clarified that more than 88% of the population in Pazardjik is of Bulgarian origin, 7 % are Roma, and 4 % - of Turkish origin. The municipal authorities have developed programmes to address the needs of all persons in economically disadvantaged situation, including among the Roma and the Turkish communities. Roma are represented in the municipal administration.

Likewise, the data of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science confirm that there is a clear trend, affecting all families in Bulgaria, including of Roma origin, of girls outnumbering the boys in the secondary and high schools.

At the national level, the Employment Strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria (updated for the period 2008-2015) aims at preventing and reducing cases of discrimination on grounds of gender, expanding the social inclusion of persons at risk ensuring their access to the labour market. In its activities, the Employment Agency carries out training and re-qualification of registered unemployed Roma in order to facilitate their integration in the labour market. The funds for these projects allocated in the 2012-2013 state budget are 9, 5 Million BGN.

Some additional programmes aimed at fostering employment and social inclusion among the Roma are: "Take you life in your hands" (financed with 11 Million BGN for the period 2012-2013,) "Adult Education" (15 Million BGN), "New Opportunities" (8,655 Million BGN), "Social Services for Social Inclusion" (23,015 Million BGN), etc. Relevant non-governmental organizations are included in the implementation of the projects.

Since 2005, the Employment Agency has been organizing specialized "job fairs" in regions with denser Roma population (in 2011, there were 6 such "job fairs").

Roma mediators are trained and appointed to promote employment. Meetings are also held locally with official representatives and informal leaders of the Roma community aimed at improving awareness and promoting employment.

8. As already mentioned above, the competent authorities do react immediately, enforcing the relevant legislation, in any cases of violence on ethnic or religious grounds. For example, after the incident with the graffiti on the wall of the mosque in Blagoevgrad, the police re-organised their regular patrols around the city to accord more attention to the area around the mosque. Specific recommendations were also made to the leadership of the Muslim denomination in the city, including the installation of additional lightening and video surveillance, as the mosque had been visited only on certain days and had stayed locked most of the time.

It should also be borne in mind that some of the incidents presented as hate crimes against Muslims might have been actually linked to the years long dispute over the leadership of the Muslim denomination – a dispute which was resolved with the decision of the Sofia Appellate Court of 20 April 2011 to grant registration of the leadership of the Muslim denomination elected by the Extraordinary National Conference.

Referring to the incident in front of the Banya Bashi mosque in Sofia, two persons were detained on the very spot of the incident, and pre-trial proceedings were initiated immediately. Five persons involved in the incident with the Jehovah's Witnesses in Bourgas have already been convicted.

9. With regard to individuals who self-identify as belonging to a Macedonian or a Pomak minority, it should be reiterated once again, that the Republic of Bulgaria adheres strictly to the principle that ethnic identity is a matter of free personal choice.

During the 2011 population census, 1,654 persons identified themselves as Macedonians. Of these, 411 persons have declared that their mother tongue was Bulgarian. These facts are included in the official census results and do not require any additional

specific act of recognition by the state authorities. These persons also enjoy fully and effectively, without any discrimination, the rights and freedoms guaranteed to all Bulgarian citizens.

Likewise, with respect to Bulgarian-speaking Muslims in Bulgaria (referred to as “Pomaks” in the report), it will be reiterated that all individuals, who identify themselves as Bulgarian Muslims, as part of the Muslim denomination in Bulgaria, enjoy protection without discrimination under any provision of the applicable international human rights law.

In conclusion, the Bulgarian authorities would like to note that the policy of the Government aimed at protecting the rights of persons belonging to various minority groups and enhancing their integration, on the basis of the principles of non-discrimination and equality, has been duly recognized by the competent international bodies, including the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which observes “...with satisfaction that the State party has taken measures and implemented programmes for the integration of minorities, for the upbringing and education of Roma children, for the promotion of the mother tongues of ethnic minorities, and for the prevention of discrimination by State officials and the police against persons from ethnic minorities”.

The Bulgarian authorities confirm their commitment to continue their constructive cooperation with the UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues.

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