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|  | **PERMANENT MISSION OF THE REPUBLIC OF**    **BULGARIA**  **TO THE UNITED NATIONS** |

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**Commission on the Status of Women**

**Sixty-First Session, New York, 13 – 24 March 2017**

**Agenda Item 3 (a) (ii) Review Theme: Challenges and achievements in the implementation of the MDGs for women and girls; Voluntary presentations by Member States, followed by an interactive dialogue**

**H.E. Mr. Georgi Panayotov, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Bulgaria to the UN**

***New York, 17 March 2017***

**Mr. Chair,**

I would like to present the progress made by Bulgaria in the implementation of the CSW58 Agreed Conclusions and the achievement of the MDGs from a gender perspective.

I would focus on the following action points:

1. Realizing the human rights of women and girls:

The Government of Bulgaria attaches great importance to gender equality and views it as an absolute necessity for the full realization of human rights and the functioning of democracy. Equality before the law is a fundamental principle enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria. Women and men in Bulgaria enjoy equal civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. Gender-based discrimination is prohibited by law.

Special laws on violence and discrimination have been adopted, including the Law for Protection against Discrimination (adopted in 2003), the Law for Protection against Domestic Violence (adopted in 2005) etc. Bulgaria is actually one of the few countries in Europe that has a special law on domestic violence.

The Government is constantly upgrading the national legislation to integrate a gender perspective.

The Law on Protection against Discrimination and the Social Security Code were amended in 2012 to guarantee the principle of equal treatment of women and men who are self-employed, and to promote women’s entrepreneurship when they are the less represented sex. Amendments have been made also to the Insurance Code and the Social Security Code to guarantee the principle of equal treatment as regards access to insurance services.

In 2016 a Law on Equality between Women and Men was adopted which establishes the principle of equality as a coordinated state policy and designates specialized bodies and mechanisms for its implementation at all levels.

Bulgaria is party to the major international human rights instruments, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol.

In April 2016 Bulgaria signed the Convention of the Council of Europe on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) and is fully committed to its implementation through the adoption of special legislative measures.

2. Strengthening the enabling environment for gender equality:

The national policy on equality between women and men and non-discrimination by gender is coordinated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and supervised at central level by the National Council on Equality between Women and Men which is a consultative body to the Council of Ministers of Bulgaria (established in 2004).

In 2005 the Commission for Protection against Discrimination was established as the national equality body of Bulgaria which functions in compliance with the Paris Principles and issues legally-binding decisions. The institution of the Ombudsman was created in 1998.

In 2016 the position of a gender equality coordinator was created in every government institution with the aim to ensure at operational level the implementation of the national policy on equality between women and men. The gender equality coordinators report to the National Council on Equality between Women and Men.

In December 2013 the Bulgarian Government established a National Coordination Mechanism on Human Rights to ensure better inter-institutional cooperation with regard to the implementation of the international human rights obligations of Bulgaria, including on gender equality. The Mechanism is chaired by the Foreign Minister and consists of other high-level officials, as well as social partners and non-governmental organizations.

The EU norms in the field of gender equality and the provisions of international instruments, including CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action form part of the national legislation and are integrated in all strategic documents and policies.

The National Strategy for the Promotion of Gender Equality was adopted in 2009 as the main policy framework document in this area. The Strategy was updated in 2016 with the aim to further strengthen the provisions related to equal treatment, equal access to resources and equal participation in decision-making. The National Strategy is implemented by all institutions through the elaboration of annual Plans of Action.

Special policies have been enacted recently for ensuring equal access of women and men to professional training, equal participation in the labour market and equal pay for equal work. The measures include introducing flexible working hours and professional mobility, providing opportunities to combine career and private life and promoting the role of the father in care-work and sharing family responsibilities, ensuring special protection for working women, etc.

These measures are of particular importance not only for the economic empowerment of women but also for overcoming the stereotypes based on the perceived social roles of women and men.

3. Women’s participation in decision-making:

In the last more than 25 years the role of Bulgarian women in the political life has steadily increased. The number of female Members of Parliament has grown more than twice since the early 90s.

For two consecutive terms women have held the office of President of the National Assembly and Mayor of Sofia. The Ombudsman of Bulgaria is a woman. The two EU Commissioners from Bulgaria were women. 30% of the Bulgarian Members in the European Parliament are women. The Director-General of UNESCO is also a Bulgarian woman.

Since the middle of the 90s women have held a number of high-level government offices, namely: Vice President (1992 - 1993, 2012 - 2017 and at present); Prime Minister (1994 - 1995); Deputy Prime Minister in several governments; Ministers, Heads of State Agencies, etc. The prevailing majority of civil servants in the central and local administration are women.

Bulgarian women are well represented also in the management and administration of the local authorities – more than 30 % of the municipal counselors are women.

Two thirds of the magistrates in the national courts at all levels are women. One third of the judges in the Constitutional Court are women.

Bulgaria ranks third in the EU in terms of women’s participation in the executive boards of large companies.

Human rights activists in Bulgaria are mainly women. Women prevail in the membership and management of Non-Governmental Organizations as well.

Women’s participation in decision-making and leadership positions at all levels is indicative of the strong commitment of the Bulgarian authorities to achieving full equality between women and men in all areas of the political and public life.

**Mr. Chair,**

The civil society in Bulgaria is very actively involved in all processes related to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, eliminating violence and discrimination against women and girls and fighting gender stereotypes, as well as awareness raising, training and education, etc. Bulgarian NGOs contribute significantly to the elaboration of relevant legislation, policies and action plans with regard to the implementation of CEDAW and all other global and regional human rights instruments and policy documents related to equality and non-discrimination.

In view of that I am honoured to have as a co-presenter today Ms. Genoveva Tisheva who is the Managing Director of the Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation – a leading Bulgarian NGO working in the field of gender equality and the human rights of women and girls.

Ms. Genoveva Tisheva is a renowned legal expert on the implementation of CEDAW and in the last 20 years has been working actively on issues related to the promotion of gender equality and the human rights of women and girls, including drafting legislation, preparing shadow reports to UN treaty bodies, delivering lectures, educating young lawyers, organizing campaigns for raising awareness, etc.

Ms. Tisheva is the Bulgarian candidate for membership in the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for the period 2019 – 2022 at the elections to be held during the 20th Conference of States Parties in June 2018 in New York.

I would like to pass the floor now to Ms. Tisheva to share her views on the topic.