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ПОСТОЯННО ПРЕДСТАВИТЕЛСТВО НА
РЕПУБЛИКА БЪЛГАРИЯ ПРИ СЛУЖБАТА НА ООН И
ДРУГИТЕ МЕЖДУНАРОДНИ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ В ЖЕНЕВА



MISSION PERMANENTE DE
LA REPUBLIQUE DE BULGARIE AUPRES DE L'ONU ET
LES AUTRES ORGANISATIONS INTERNATIONALES A GENEVE

No 776

Geneva, December 15th, 2016

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Bulgaria to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Secretariat of the United Nations (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues) and has the honour to transmit herewith the information provided by the Bulgarian authorities as follow up to the visit of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Ms. Rita Izsak, and the recommendations in the report A/HRC/19/56/ADD.2, in response to the request submitted by Ms. Rita Izsak, on 11th October 2016.

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Bulgaria to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Secretariat of the United Nations (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights) the assurances of its highest consideration.

Annex: in accordance with the text – 7 pages



Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
Mandate of the Special Rapporteur on minority issues
Geneva

**CONTRIBUTION BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA AS
FOLLOW UP TO THE VISIT OF THE SPECIAL RAPPOREUR ON MINORITY ISSUES,
MS. RITA IZSAK, AND THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN REPORT A/HRC/19/56/ADD.2**

The government of the Republic of Bulgaria extends its gratitude for the work of the Special Rapporteur. We would like to note that all recommendations by UN special procedures are highly valued and carefully considered by the respective state bodies. All findings and considerations are being taken into account and put into practice, wherever possible, while considering the national policy and priorities.

We would like to convey the following supplementary information on the protection of minority groups in the Republic of Bulgaria:

Framework

Since April 2012, by a decree of the Government, the ethnic issues have been transferred from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to the Government administration. The National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues (NCCEII) was designed as a coordinating and consultative body, assisting the Government in formulating the policy on the integration of minority groups.

The National Strategy for Roma Integration in the Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020) has been developed. The Strategy corresponds to and incorporates the objectives and principles of the main policy documents on integration. It covers six priority areas of the integration policy: education, health, housing, employment, rule of law and non-discrimination, culture and media. Measures targeting Roma children are exclusively planned under the "Education" priority. The "Healthcare" section attaches particular significance to children and motherhood. These are also addressed under the "Culture and media" priority and under "Rule of law and non-discrimination". The rest of the measures for ensuring employment and living conditions contribute to the improvement of the situation of children in vulnerable Roma families.

According to the main strategic documents for minority groups integration into Bulgarian society and overcoming the inequalities and discriminatory practices, the application of horizontal (mainstreaming) approach is of particular importance. This assures that their needs, concerns and rights are integrated into the general and sectoral policies and measures. It also creates conditions for equal opportunities, equality and equal participation in the social, economic and political life. Simultaneously, it is also necessary to undertake temporary incentives (positive actions) in various sectors of society, whereby not only to overcome existing inequalities and inequities, but also to prevent future ones.

To emphasize the importance attributed to achieving progress in the integration of Roma people and to respond to requests made by a group of Roma NGOs for changes in the structural and organizational framework for implementation of the policy for Roma integration, a special body at NCCEII was set up – a Commission for the implementation of the National Strategy. The Commission designated six coordinators - representatives of NGOs - for each of the priorities of the strategy, who will work in cooperation with the relevant institutions.

to the age of 16. The priority of the Ministry of Education and Science, the regional education inspectorates and the Municipalities is to create conditions for equality and adaptation of children and students of Roma origin in the educational environment. For the integration of children and students from the ethnic groups, including children of Roma origin, the educational system undertakes preventive, interventional and compensatory measures.

There has been a serious increase in the efforts for the integration of children of Roma origin in the general education system. With the amendment of the Public Education Act, mandatory two-year training before entering the first grade has been introduced for children at the age of 5. The measure aims at providing equal start for every child, including children from vulnerable ethnic communities. Trainings for teachers for working in a multicultural educational environment are the usual practice nowadays. The competent authorities supervise kindergartens and schools to prevent forming of ethnic groups and classes.

In August 2010, the Bulgarian authorities officially launched the implementation of the Social Inclusion Project (SIP). The main objective is to promote social inclusion through increasing the school readiness of children below the age of 7. The target groups are low-income and vulnerable families, including vulnerable ethnic groups, in particular Roma, as well as children with disabilities and other special needs. One of the most important parts of the SIP is related to integration of children in kindergartens and pre-school groups/classes. This includes the creation of places in kindergartens by building new or renovating existing kindergartens. Among the measures, there are those, such as, complete or partial reduction of the fee for kindergarten, individual and group work with children and parents, including with children and parents who are not vulnerable. Free transport is provided for children to kindergartens and back.

The Government, through the Ministry of Education and Science adopted a Strategy for educational integration for children and students from ethnic minority groups (2015-2020). An Action Plan for execution of the Strategy has also been adopted. This is the first sector document contributing to the development of Bulgarian education in the context of educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities.

Trainings for teachers for working in a multicultural educational environment are conducted under projects realized by the Centre for Educational Integration of Children and Young People from the minorities (CEICSEM) and the Directorate General "Structural Funds and International Educational Programmes" at the Ministry of Education and Science. They teach application of adequate psychological and teaching approaches in accordance with the cultural ethnicity of the children, of appropriate forms of teaching interaction and with priority use of interactive methods and technology for working with children and parents. This also includes parents in activities, aimed at changing the attitude for joint educational activity in kindergartens and schools.

The national programme "School without Absences" was introduced in 2012. Its purpose is to reduce the number of absences by recording them correctly in the school documentation, to take genuine and effective measures for motivating the students to attend regularly school classes and to attract the parents as partners in relation to school life. The national programme supports the schools, which implement their own strategies for reducing the number of absences and for overcoming the early dropping out of school.

vulnerable urban communities in four municipalities. As a result, 83 buildings were reconstructed and 180 homes were constructed. A total of 905 representatives of vulnerable groups benefited, including Roma.

There is also a pilot model for integrated interventions. It includes support, including investments for social housing and measures to ensure better access to the labour market, social and health services. This model has been reported as a good example of coordination and complementarities between the two programmes, namely, Regional Development and Integra. It is to be upgraded during the period 2014-2020 with special attention for the provision of modern social housing for vulnerable, minority and socially disadvantaged groups.

Labour

The Employment Agency organizes and conducts specialized job fairs aimed at the Roma community. The purpose of the exchanges is to support the employment of unemployed persons of Roma origin, by facilitating their access to information on available jobs and provide direct contact and negotiate with employers.

An agreement for Social Inclusion of Roma and other vulnerable groups has been signed under the Bulgarian-Swiss co-operation programme. Six Bulgarian municipalities have been included in a joint programme of the EC and of the CE ROMED2/ROMACT.

The employment policy targets the following groups: unemployed youth up to 29 years, unemployed over 50 years, long-term unemployed, disabled unemployed, unemployed Roma, inactive persons, etc. Providing people with equal access to the labour market is a key aim in Bulgaria's path towards reducing inequalities. Specific measures were implemented to create conditions for increased employment of unemployed Roma by promoting entrepreneurship, education and appropriate living conditions. This is a standing point for their equal inclusion in society.

The Employment Agency, through its Labour Office Departments (LOD), implements the program "Activation of inactive persons". The main objective is to activate and to include in the labour market of inactive and discouraged persons by motivating them to register as jobseeker, and to use the mediation services provided by LOD for employment or enrolment in training.

Most of the persons included in the program are members of the Roma community who have no education or with low education and skills. The activities of the mediators are to provide intermediary services in LOD and to work among the Roma community. Specific activity of mediators in the community consists in organizing and conducting information campaigns "Come and register in LOD", conducting individual and group meetings with inactive persons on the spot as well as meetings with representatives of NGOs, social partners and employers. At present, 57 mediators are working in 52 LODs.

Since the middle of 2011, a programme "Take Your Life in Your Own Hands" has been implemented, directed to the non-active unemployed persons from the most vulnerable groups of the population. The most important activities fulfilled being: professional training and education for acquisition of key competencies; submitting mediator services to ensure possibilities for internship with an employer; those who have completed successfully their education are included in an internship programme, etc. At the end of 2013 a total of 3341 persons were included in education courses. 3 018

status, property status, or any other grounds provided for by law or international treaties. The Bulgarian authorities closely monitor all alleged manifestations of racism and intolerance against any person on the territory of the State, and, where necessary, resolutely take steps to punish such acts. It should be highlighted that Bulgaria has not a strong record of such acts or manifestations. However, Bulgarian authorities will continue to be vigilant, since similar developments could not be underestimated.

Bulgaria strictly adheres to the principle that ethnic identity is a matter of free personal choice for any individual.

With regard concretely to individuals who identify themselves as Macedonians, the Republic of Bulgaria, as repeatedly stated, adheres to the principle that ethnic identity is a matter of free personal choice. Accordingly, during the 2011 population census, 1609 persons have self-determined themselves as Macedonians. Among them, 411 persons have declared the Bulgarian language as their mother tongue. These facts are included in the official census results which are freely available and do not require any additional specific act of recognition by the state authorities. It should be reiterated, though, that these persons enjoy fully and effectively, without any discrimination, the rights and freedoms guaranteed to all Bulgarian citizens.

The 2011 census of the population and housing was the first census conducted by Bulgaria as a Member State of the European Union. Census forms and instructions on questions relating to the ethnic and demographic characteristics are based on accepted standards in the UN and the EU on the formulating and approach to the processing of these questions. Special attention was paid to the fact that the basic principles in collecting information about the ethnic group, mother tongue and religion are the principle of self-determination and the principle of voluntary responding. It was explained that the approach adopted - the person who is counted to indicate the answer itself, without being limited or directed by enumeration of possibilities, not only does not limit self-determination and voluntariness, on the contrary - it guarantees it.

The Religious Denominations Act is not restrictive and discriminatory. It is in conformity with UN core instruments on Human Rights: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 18), the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, Art. 18), the European Convention on Human Rights, the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief etc. In addition, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1390 (2004) expressly emphasises that the law represents an important step towards guaranteeing religious rights and freedoms. All religious denominations shall be free and equal in rights. For that purpose, the legislator has granted them equal opportunities to participate in the social life. The registration procedure under the Religious Denominations Act is necessary in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health and morals, and for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

The attacks over religious shrines are rather occasional in the Republic of Bulgaria. Isolated cases of a private nature cannot serve as a basis for generalizations concerning the overall situation in the country. However, such act should not be underestimated and they are closely followed by the competent authorities. Furthermore many of the alleged perpetrators are faced counts for hooliganism on the grounds of hatred.