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Summary record of the 9th meeting

Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Friday, 22 February 2019, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Mr. Zerbini Ribeiro Leão

Contents

Consideration of reports (*continued*)

- (a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (*continued*)

Sixth periodic report of Bulgaria (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Consideration of reports (continued)

(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (continued)

Sixth periodic report of Bulgaria (continued) (E/C.12/BGR/6; E/C.12/BGR/QPR/6)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of Bulgaria took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Mr. Sterk** (Bulgaria) said that the rights of minority groups were covered under article 6 of the Constitution, which provided for the protection of the rights of all persons without distinction. That approach was in line with article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, on the rights of ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities.

3. **Ms. Spassova** (Bulgaria) said that, for the past 25 years, the Constitution had upheld the rights of minority groups through a successful model of inter-ethnic relations based on the values of pluralist democracy and civil society. Bulgaria had become a party to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 1999, and had since applied it in good faith. In the absence of a definition of the term “national minorities” in the Framework Convention, its scope of application was the exclusive competence of the parties themselves. In Bulgaria, ethnic identity was a matter of personal choice, and all citizens were able to freely state their affiliation with an ethnic, religious or linguistic group. The Bulgarian Government had demonstrated its commitment to such values notably by providing for mother-tongue education even where it benefited only a small number of students.

4. **Mr. Iliev** (Bulgaria) said that a pension ceiling had first been introduced into legislation in 1926. There were three pillars to the pension system, the first and second of which were compulsory and the third voluntary. The first pillar operated on a pay-as-you-go basis, financed by social security contributions rather than individual accounts, and placed limits on higher pensions, based on the solidarity principle, so as to ensure minimum pension amounts for all. Up to 2018, the first-pillar ceiling, as a percentage of the maximum insurable income of approximately 130 euros per month, had been set at 35 per cent; in July 2019, it would rise to 40 per cent. The maximum pension would therefore be approximately 650 euros per year. In addition, pensioners received the compulsory second-pillar pension, which was funded through individual contributions. The European Court of Human Rights, in the *Valkov* case referred to by the Committee, had found that the cap on pensions did not breach the right to protection of property. There had also been two cases brought at the domestic level, in 1997 and 2012, in both of which the courts had found that the ceiling did not contravene the Constitution. The ceiling was therefore fully compliant with the State’s international and constitutional obligations.

5. **Ms. Rousinova** (Bulgaria) said that the national unemployment rate in 2018 had been 5.2 per cent, which compared favourably with the European average of 6 per cent; the government forecast for 2021 was 4 per cent. Vulnerable groups were seen as a potential labour force. According to data from the most recent census, the employment rate among Roma was below the overall employment rate; however, for those with a high level of education the difference was only 3.8 percentage points. Unemployment among the Roma community was therefore linked to lack of qualifications, not to ethnic differences. The activity rate among Roma with a high level of education (75.4 per cent) was in fact higher than the overall activity rate (73 per cent). In 2018, 28 specialized job fairs for persons with basic and low levels of education and qualifications had been held, mostly in rural and remote areas, as a result of which 2,000 persons had found work. Under national programmes, 79 Roma mediators were employed to work in rural areas, and of 10,000 long-term unemployed persons who had been registered in labour offices, over half were Roma. In 2018, a total of 31,000 persons registered as unemployed had identified as Roma, down 16 per cent on the previous year. Of that total, 9,000 had found work, 78 per cent on the primary labour market and only 22 per cent under national programmes and schemes. A total of 50,000 people had received assistance in actively searching for employment, 7,000 had received vocational guidance and 2,000 had acquired a professional qualification. The net effect of employment

programmes and schemes had been shown to be the most positive for the Roma ethnic group, meaning that the targeted measures for Roma inclusion in the labour market were having tangible effects.

6. According to Eurostat, in 2017, 19 per cent of the Bulgarian population aged 60 years and over had reported long-standing disabilities, compared to the European Union average of 25 per cent. According to the National Employment Agency, the number of registered unemployed persons with disabilities in 2018 had been 13,000, down 2,000 on 2016. As a result of government employment measures targeting persons with disabilities, 7,000 unemployed persons with disabilities had joined various programmes funded by the Government and by the European Union; of those, 3,600 had participated in training in key competences or vocational training. Assessment of the net effect in 2017 had showed that employment measures and programmes had been more positive for persons with disabilities than for persons without disabilities. Quotas for the employment of persons with disabilities in companies were provided for in legislation, including in the Labour Code and in the new Persons with Disabilities Act. Quotas were determined according to the size of the employer, and penalties imposed for failure to meet the quotas were combined with tax incentives to employ persons with disabilities. Targeted national programmes provided training and financial support in that regard.

7. Under the Youth Guarantee of the European Commission, the proportion of young people not in employment, education or training had fallen from 18 per cent in 2016 to 15 per cent in 2018. Over the same period, the proportion of young people registered as unemployed had decreased by more than 30 per cent. Targeted measures in 2017 had resulted in 20,000 young people participating in job-search workshops, 12,000 embarking on vocational training and 10,000 starting work. A total of 4,400 unemployed young people had found work through youth careers fairs. Youth mediators had proved to be one of the most effective mechanisms in motivating young people to start work.

8. The proportion of long-term unemployed people had fallen by almost 6 per cent in 2018 compared to 2017, to 2.8 per cent. Job integration agreements had been introduced in 2018, and had already been signed by 52,000 long-term unemployed people. Most European and national investment for training and reskilling the labour force was targeted at long-term unemployed people.

9. According to Eurostat, the gender employment gap had been only 8 per cent in 2017, compared to the European Union average of 11.5 per cent. While it was true that the activity and employment rates for men were higher, the unemployment rate for women was lower than that for men: in 2018, it had stood at 4.7 per cent for women and 5.8 per cent for men. The proportion of women among long-term unemployed people was also lower than that of men. Initiatives had been introduced to encourage mothers to return to the labour market, including a national programme in support of day care.

10. **Ms. Mincheva** (Bulgaria) said that national legislation provided for the design and construction of an accessible living and architectural environment for the entire population, taking account of the specific needs of persons with disabilities. Accessibility of the urban environment to the whole population was regulated at the earliest possible stage, during planning, and was provided for through minimum specific requirements relating to, inter alia, pedestrian areas, pedestrian crossings, allocated parking spaces and accessible public transport. In 2016, the Council of Ministers had initiated a process to amend national legislation related to the accessible architectural environment in order to align it with international standards. Existing policies and legislation had been assessed and possible scenarios for supplementing or drafting new policies evaluated; the results of that process were being analysed in order to include the proposed measures in the relevant legal framework. Specific measures aimed at increasing the accessibility of the architectural environment for persons with disabilities included free assistance by trained staff at bus terminals, designated areas for buses collecting and dropping off passengers with disabilities, provision for guide dogs, and the provision in hotels of accessible rooms, ramps, wheelchairs and dedicated sanitary facilities.

11. **Ms. Lekova** (Bulgaria) said that, with a view to providing affordable and sustainable housing, the Government had introduced several policies that shared the main principles of

international agreements such as the Geneva Charter on Sustainable Housing of the Economic Commission for Europe, and the New Urban Agenda. The Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works had drafted a new housing strategy, with the aim of creating a new model that ensured access to housing for all on the basis of a shared undertaking by the municipalities, the private sector and citizens. Strategic goals and associated key measures targeted the specific challenges of poor housing maintenance, low energy-efficiency, a large deficit in social housing and insufficient administrative and financial capacity.

12. A total of 70,259 buildings, or over a million dwellings, were in poor condition and required renovation. Two thirds of those dwellings were in prefabricated buildings constructed between 1960 and 1989, and 98 per cent were in cities. A large proportion of the affected households were families with very low income. Approximately 2.53 million people lived in such prefabricated buildings, representing a third of the overall population of Bulgaria. A total of 96.9 per cent of dwellings in Bulgaria were owned by private individuals, 2.6 per cent by the municipal authorities and 0.5 per cent by private and legal entities. Approximately 50 per cent of dwellings in small towns stood vacant, as a result mainly of owners migrating to larger towns, or of owners living abroad and returning to their dwelling for only two weeks to a month annually.

13. Key measures to tackle the deficit in social housing included tax incentives to owners of vacant properties to make them available for social purposes, affordable housing for young families, support for the construction and renovation of municipal rental housing, shelters and sheltered dwellings for homeless persons and energy-efficiency measures. Specifically regarding energy-efficiency, a programme introduced in 2015 targeted the renovation of large residential buildings, and had been decentralized to the 265 municipalities eligible to apply. The municipal authorities themselves were responsible for the overall technical and financial administration of the programme on their territory, and an even greater level of decentralization was envisaged for the future. A total of 2,022 buildings had been approved under the programme, and 1,537 dwellings had been renovated by the end of 2018.

14. **Ms. Yancheva** (Bulgaria) said that, in Bulgaria, information about ethnicity, religion and mother tongue could be submitted only on a voluntary basis. Censuses were conducted every 10 years; the next one, scheduled for 2021, would include optional questions on ethnicity, religion and mother tongue.

15. **Ms. Rousinova** (Bulgaria) said that Bulgaria provided relatively generous maternity leave, offering 410 days of leave in total, including 45 days prior to delivery. During the first year of leave, the daily maternity benefit was equivalent to 90 per cent of the average daily remuneration and was not subject to taxation or social security contributions. Once the baby reached the age of six months, the leave could be transferred to the father. According to statistics, on an annual basis, an average of 400 fathers elected to take transferred leave; 21,000 fathers took 15 days of paternity leave; and 87,000 mothers took maternity leave.

16. Combating poverty was one of the key priorities of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. The Ministry had introduced two-year action plans in order to fulfil the National Strategy for Reducing Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion 2020. Various social reforms had been introduced, resulting in additional budget allocations. The guaranteed minimum income schemes for services had been increased; the budget for persons with disabilities had been significantly increased; and a pension reform under way would raise pensions gradually on an annual basis. Unemployment benefits had also increased by 25 per cent; heating allowances, from which 209,000 people benefited, had been raised; and family benefits had been increased with a view to tackling child poverty. Every year, 35,000 children received social assistance to begin school.

17. According to statistics, there were 1,880 homeless persons in Bulgaria. The Government and municipalities had established several types of service centres that worked with street children, as well as temporary accommodation centres and shelters. European Union funding was being used to build additional centres and train personnel. With regard to the deinstitutionalization of children, major reforms had been under way since 2010, and 90 per cent of institutions for children had been closed. Only 600 children were still placed in

institutions; those institutions would be closed in the next two years, and any remaining children would be placed with foster families.

18. **Mr. Sterk** (Bulgaria), referring to concerns about the percentage of the population living below the poverty line, said that statistics from 2017 on the matter were being updated and validated in coordination with Eurostat. Those data would shed light on the progress that had been made since 2012, but they could not be submitted to the Committee until they had been finalized.

19. **Ms. Mincheva** (Bulgaria), referring to energy poverty, said that most buildings in Bulgaria were panel blocks of flats based on a central heating design and that gas heating was not very common in the country. The Government was therefore focusing its efforts on large panel blocks of flats and had begun to address heating problems in the common areas of the buildings. Almost 1,600 buildings, each of which housed at least 36 families, had already been renovated and refitted, and the tenants affected claimed that their energy bills had already decreased by 40 or more per cent. Moreover, between 2012 and 2015, 156 buildings had been renovated in 32 cities, resulting in energy savings of between 40 and 60 per cent. However, many of the latter buildings were small houses that had benefited from grants.

20. **Ms. Rousinova** (Bulgaria) said that Bulgaria had complex legislation concerning property rights and housing. When a family failed to comply with regulations governing housing construction and lived in an illegally constructed house or building, the relevant municipality would intervene to relocate the family and provide it with the necessary accommodation. Municipalities coordinated with social and health services, especially to provide care for children at risk, and provided social housing, crisis centres and shelters, as well as support mechanisms for children who were relocated to a new village to attend school. In other words, the competent authorities took the necessary measures to protect the rights of those affected by the relocation.

21. **Ms. Yancheva** (Bulgaria) said that, according to the Directorate for National Construction Control, out of 5,911 orders that had been issued for the removal of illegal buildings, approximately 300 of them related to illegal buildings occupied by Roma.

22. **Ms. Nacheva** (Bulgaria) said that the Bulgarian health-care system consisted of two pillars: compulsory health insurance and voluntary health insurance. The former was covered by the National Health Insurance Fund. The total budget for health care had doubled since 2008, some 80 per cent of which came from the National Health Insurance Fund. Services that were not covered by the National Health Insurance Fund were covered by the budget of the Ministry of Health.

23. Psychiatric care was covered by the National Health Strategy 2020, the aims of which were to develop complex services for persons with mental illness; to build effective partnership mechanisms between health, justice, education and social services; to tackle stigmas surrounding mental illness; and to develop networks of specialized services within communities. The guiding principles of the Strategy were to ensure the maximum recovery of persons with mental illness and to promote tolerance in order to ensure their successful reintegration into the community. A number of mental health centres were being developed, and mobile services were envisaged for persons living in remote and hard-to-reach areas. Moreover, the salaries of employees working in State psychiatric hospitals had increased in 2018; three psychiatric hospitals had been awarded funding to improve their facilities; and mental health centres in several villages had been renovated. Thirty million leva had been spent on mental health care in 2018, and the budget for 2019 had increased to 32 million leva.

24. With regard to measures taken to enhance access to medical care and treatment by persons with dementia and Alzheimer's disease, steps were being taken to ensure the early diagnosis of such diseases. Diagnoses were carried out by general practitioners and covered by the National Health Insurance Fund and later confirmed by neurologists and psychiatrists. Persons with dementia and Alzheimer's saw specialists once every four months and received appropriate treatment through the National Health Insurance Fund.

25. Drug use was not criminalized in Bulgaria, and the first completely free treatment programme for heroin dependents had been launched in 1995. There were currently 30

treatment programmes available to opioid addicts, many of which offered free treatment to a limited number of persons.

26. **Ms. Spassova** (Bulgaria) said that in 2016, a completely new and modern draft law on persons with disabilities had been prepared, with a view to bringing Bulgarian legislation into line with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The draft law established support measures for persons with disabilities, as well as persons with intellectual and psychological disorders, and had undergone public consultations, but had not yet been examined by parliament due to the premature termination of the previous National Assembly. A new working group on the draft law had recently been created, and it was hoped that the draft law would be examined by parliament in the near future.

27. **Ms. Rousinova** (Bulgaria) said that the 2016 reform of the Social Assistance Act had reinforced guarantees for the rights of users of social services, including their right to free choice. Although the accommodation and service needs of persons placed under the care of a guardian continued to be determined by the court, procedures had been adjusted to ensure that the individual concerned was consulted. The Government had undertaken to close all residential institutions for persons with dementia and other mental disabilities by 2035 and had earmarked 35 million euros for infrastructure development and 74 million euros for services and soft measures. At present, the Ministry was working to develop alternative solutions with around 500 community day-care and rehabilitation centres.

28. **Mr. Lashev** (Bulgaria) said that foreign nationals legally residing in Bulgaria enjoyed the same rights as nationals, except where rights were dependent upon citizenship. Bulgarian law adhered to the principles established in the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees – for example, there were no penalties for illegal entry and refoulement was prohibited – and a 2013 amendment to the Act on Foreign Nationals in Bulgaria had extended its scope to include persons in need of international protection. The institutional and policy framework for preventing illegal immigration while protecting persons seeking international protection and/or refugee status was set out in the National Strategy on Migration, Asylum and Integration for the period 2015–2020, adopted in June 2015.

29. The guiding principle in the care of unaccompanied and separated migrant children was the best interests of the child. Age determination procedures were conducted promptly, together with a comprehensive assessment of each child's needs, and the child would then be placed in the care of either a foster family or a specialized institution. All migrant children, whether or not they were accompanied, had access to education under the same conditions as Bulgarian citizens and were provided with the documents necessary for enrolment. Adolescents also had the option of following vocational training and could opt to study part-time or in the evening. In secondary schools, a special Bulgarian language curriculum for teaching migrant children had been introduced.

30. **Mr. Sadi** said that he had noted a tendency to break down information and statistics along ethnic lines and to view national minorities as distinct populations when considering access to housing, health care and education, among other issues. He would like to see the State party taking a broader perspective on areas of concern rather than categorizing problems as being specific to the Greek, Roma, Romanian or Turkish community. With that in mind, he would welcome details of any Government policies that promoted the integration of national minorities.

31. **Mr. Uprimny** said that, with the Global Fund's withdrawal from harm reduction projects having raised a question mark over their sustainability, he would welcome the delegation's assurances that preventive health programmes would be maintained, if not extended. Given that Bulgaria had the second highest Gini coefficient of European Union countries, according to Eurostat data, he would also like to know whether strategies to reduce income equality were being developed alongside poverty reduction strategies: without the former, the latter's efficacy was severely diminished.

32. **Ms. Shin** said that she would appreciate clarification on certain aspects of the State party's maternity, paternity and parental leave provisions. Firstly, could the delegation confirm that the full period of leave was taken into account for pension and promotion eligibility calculations? Secondly, could it indicate what percentage, specifically, of working fathers availed themselves of the 15-day paternity leave allowance and subsequent parental

leave entitlements? Lastly, was it the norm for mothers to return to work after giving birth or were they more likely to stay at home? And did society in general view child-rearing as the shared responsibility of both parents?

33. **Mr. Sterk** (Bulgaria) said that, although in national censuses participants had the right and the opportunity to self-identify as members of a particular ethnic, religious or other minority group, there was not otherwise any specific policy of pursuing ethnic identification as a divider of society nor any specific practice of disaggregating data and information along such lines. However, it was evident that certain communities living in compact groups in certain regions were more vulnerable than others and in such circumstances the authorities were under an obligation to take action to help the disadvantaged group in question overcome their particular vulnerabilities. Moreover, the policy focus on the Roma was in line with a Europe-wide policy that had its roots in the Decade of Roma Inclusion and the various programmes being run in Bulgaria were part of efforts to fulfil its commitments within the wider European framework. Nonetheless, the Government was at the same time working to further the integration of all communities in Bulgaria. The National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues was the body responsible for coordinating those efforts.

34. **Ms. Topakbachian** (Bulgaria) said that the Government had a targeted and consistent policy of encouraging and supporting the Roma minority's integration in all spheres of public life. The National Strategy for Roma Integration 2012–2020 set out national priorities and objectives for integration and special measures had been adopted to advance progress towards those goals. The national mechanism for coordination, cooperation, partnership, exchange and dialogue on ethnic minorities served as the national Roma contact point for implementation of the National Strategy while the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues coordinated implementation at the administrative and ministerial levels. Support for implementation of the Strategy at the regional and local levels was also well developed: local and municipal action plans were in place and representatives of all stakeholders, including civil society, were involved in planning. A monitoring system had been developed to evaluate the efficacy of specific measures and the data it generated would be submitted to policymaking institutions, after analysis, to be used as a guide for future policy decisions.

35. **Ms. Nacheva** (Bulgaria) said that the Ministry of Health's budget projections provided for the continuation of HIV, tuberculosis and harm reduction programmes and that the authorities were drawing on other European sources of financing to guarantee the sustainability of related services.

36. **Ms. Rousinova** (Bulgaria) said that the Government was trying very hard to achieve economic convergence with the European Union. The national 2020 strategy encompassed all economic and poverty goals that the Government was pursuing. The 2030 strategy, currently under development, would be focused on financial sector stability, economic growth and income distribution, those being the current Government's main priorities. Income inequality would be addressed primarily through poverty reduction and improvements in education.

37. In Bulgaria women typically went back to work after having children. There was little difference between unemployment rates among men and women because most non-working women were actively seeking employment. The Government offered various incentives, such as free day care, to encourage both parents to remain in work.

38. In the European Union, Bulgaria was a champion in a number of work-related areas. It led the rankings for women's representation in the information and communications technology sector and ranked second for women's participation in scientific research and engineering. In addition, it offered one of the best maternity and parental leave schemes in Europe, if not the world: she could confirm that all three years of maternity leave were taken into account for pension and promotion eligibility calculations. Bulgaria had also been taking the lead in discussions on the proposed European Union Work-Life Balance Directive and in efforts to encourage fathers to take more responsibility for raising children.

39. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** said that enrolment fees could impede access to preschool for children from disadvantaged social backgrounds and could thus harm the State party's efforts to achieve universal preschool education. Furthermore, the online enrolment

system could constitute an insurmountable technical challenge for parents with few resources and limited Internet access. What was the Government doing to mitigate issues of that kind?

40. He would appreciate an explanation for the marked decline in the number of children entering primary education over the past 10 years, along with details of the strategy being pursued to reverse that trend. Over the same period, there had also been a marked increase in school dropout rates. Since the strategy adopted in 2013 had failed to quell the increase, details of the Government's latest plan of action to prevent dropouts would be useful, together with an indication of the results it was expected to achieve.

41. According to recent surveys, a majority of students in Bulgaria had noted negative and even aggressive attitudes towards members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex community, yet, as far as he was aware, there had been no campaigns to combat bullying on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity. Was the State party considering action to address that lacuna? He would also appreciate the delegation's comments on the notion of de facto segregation in schools that was currently under the spotlight in Europe. Was the State party conscious of the risk of such segregation in Bulgaria and what was being done to prevent or eliminate it?

42. Statistics indicated that as many of 50 per cent of persons with disabilities did not have access to education and that around 8,000 children with disabilities of different forms were not currently in school. He would like to know whether transportation issues and the need to adapt infrastructures and teaching materials had a role in that situation and what was being done to ensure access to the best possible education for all person with disabilities.

43. Statistics also indicated that levels of digital competence among young persons in Bulgaria were considerably lower than elsewhere in Europe. He wondered what was causing that disparity and what was being done to reduce it.

44. Although the State party had provided ample evidence of good practice in the management of its rich and diverse cultural heritage, he would like more information about efforts to ensure that the historical and artistic contributions of the different cultural and ethnic sources were all duly reflected in that diverse heritage. He would particularly like to know about efforts made to promote and preserve the contributions of the Turkish and the Sephardic Jewish cultures.

45. **Ms. Stoilova** (Bulgaria) said that keeping children in education was a key priority for the Government. Students dropped out for a number of reasons, including early marriage and the need to work to support their families. Efforts were being made to ensure that all students who had dropped out returned to school.

46. **Ms. Kaneva** (Bulgaria) said that the Ministry of Culture supported tangible and intangible heritage through a number of different programmes. Cultural centres throughout the country, including isolated regions, organized festivals and events to showcase the culture of local ethnic minorities.

47. **Ms. Kostadinova** (Bulgaria), acknowledging that bullying was a serious problem in schools in Bulgaria, said that, in 2017, more than 80 per cent of schools had reported at least one violent incident on their premises. In 2019 the Ministry of Education and Science would carry out a joint project with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the National Network for Children with the aim of ensuring safety in schools and raising awareness of how to report and respond to bullying.

48. **Ms. Rousinova** (Bulgaria) said that thanks to a joint mechanism overseen by the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Social Assistance Agency and local authorities, since 2018 more than 42,000 students who had dropped out previously had returned to school. Social workers and teachers worked with parents to help children go back to school, including in Roma communities. Families were given the books or clothes their children needed for school if they were unable to afford them.

49. While there were no segregated schools in Bulgaria, some schools in areas with large Roma communities had large numbers of Roma students. The Government had established a programme designed to provide support to those schools and to improve Roma children's inclusion in the education system.

50. **Mr. Sterk** (Bulgaria) said that, during its presidency of the Council of the European Union between January and June 2018, Bulgaria had made gender equality in the digital sector one of its priorities. Digital Day, which would be observed in Europe on 9 April 2019, would provide an opportunity to raise awareness of the role of women in the high-technology sector.

51. In connection with the preservation of Sephardic Jewish heritage, he was pleased to report that the synagogue in Vidin was now under the ownership of the municipal authorities, which had committed to restoring the building.

52. **Ms. Liebenberg** asked what the Government was doing to ensure that a long-term strategy was in place to provide sustainable care for older persons, particularly those with dementia or Alzheimer's disease.

53. **Mr. Sadi** said that he would like to know whether human rights education, including information on the Covenant, was given in the State party. Was there a policy in place to ensure that students from different cultural backgrounds were integrated into schools?

54. **Mr. Mancisidor de la Fuente** said that the Committee would be grateful for information regarding the key issue of access to primary education in the State party.

55. **Ms. Rousinova** (Bulgaria) said that, in 2014, the Government had adopted a national strategy for long-term care. A plan was in place for the period 2018–2021 to improve the infrastructure for long-term care and to hire and train specialized workers in related services. Four major objectives had been set for 2020: the closure of 10 institutions for persons with disabilities, the establishment of integrated services for persons with dementia, the creation of home-based services for older persons and persons with disabilities, and the adoption of new legislation designed to guarantee the provision of long-term care. In 2018, a bill on social services had been passed; it was expected to be adopted by parliament by the end of February 2019.

56. **Ms. Topakbachian** (Bulgaria) said that all students had equal access to education irrespective of their ethnic background. In 2018, the Ministry of Education and Science had amended its regulations so that Roma children could attend other schools in cases where applying the principal criteria of the proximity of a child's home to a particular school would otherwise lead to classes made up solely of Roma students.

57. **Ms. Stoilova** (Bulgaria) said that since 2016, all schools for persons with intellectual disabilities had been converted into centres providing specialist educational support, including therapeutic and rehabilitation activities. There were three schools for children with hearing impairments in Bulgaria and two for children with visual impairments. Specialists from those schools also provided support to children with sensory disabilities who attended mainstream schools.

58. **Mr. Sterk** (Bulgaria) said that trainee judges received specialized human rights instruction, as did law enforcement officers at the Academy of the Ministry of the Interior. More generally, the delegation had taken note of the Committee's questions and recommendations, and would endeavour to submit any outstanding replies within 48 hours.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.