Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
Sixty-fifth session

Summary record of the 8th meeting
Held at the Palais Wilson, Geneva, on Thursday, 21 February 2019, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Zerbini Ribeiro Leão

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.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 (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), providing an overview of recent developments and current challenges in the area of economic, social and cultural rights in Bulgaria, said that a National Coordination Mechanism for Human Rights, comprised of ministers, heads of State institutions and independent institutions, and representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), had been established in 2013. It was expected to improve coordination among the public bodies in fulfilling Bulgaria’s human rights obligations, and recommend amendments to domestic legislation and administrative practices.

3. The Ombudsman’s Office had applied for A status under the principles relating to the status of national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights (Paris Principles). To that end, legislative amendments and other measures had been undertaken to comply with the Committee’s previous recommendations, broaden the scope of the Ombudsman’s mandate, strengthen its engagement with the treaty body system and civil society, and increase the transparency of its appointment and selection process.

4. During its Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2018, Bulgaria had focused on the rights of the child, particularly the inclusive education of children with disabilities and the promotion of early childhood development as an integrated policy instrument. Other priorities had been to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment, specifically the advancement of women in the digital world, and to ensure equal rights for persons with disabilities, particularly in the labour market.

5. While the provisions of the Covenant were directly applied at all levels of the Bulgarian legal system, the Ministry of Justice had introduced training programmes to increase awareness of the Covenant and the justiciability of its provisions among judges, lawyers and public officials. Moreover, the competent ministries and agencies had studied the Committee’s 2018 statement on climate change and the Covenant. The Third National Action Plan on Climate Change for the period 2012–2020 provided for the implementation and biennial monitoring of measures to reduce greenhouse emissions across all sectors.

6. The sixth periodic report had been prepared in a transparent manner, with the participation of the Commission for Protection against Discrimination, the Ombudsman and all other relevant human rights authorities and institutions. Since the submission of the report, further progress had been made under the Programme for Governance for the period 2017–2021, for example in providing child and family support, ensuring the equal rights of persons with disabilities, providing sustainable income increases, and addressing the country’s negative demographic trends.

7. Mr. Abashidze (Country Rapporteur) said that the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which was applied directly by the State party, contained provisions that overlapped with the Covenant and other international instruments. It would be useful to know how the State party applied rights covered by multiple instruments, and whether there had been any problems or achievements of note.

8. As numerous ministries were responsible for follow-up to the Sustainable Development Goals, it would be helpful to know how the National Statistical Institute monitored and collated information from all relevant sources, and how that information affected the development of legislation. For example, he would appreciate information on the driving forces behind the legislation relating to persons with disabilities adopted in the past year. Secondly, he wished to know whether there was a national plan for achieving the Goals and how existing programmes, strategies and funding allocations were being adapted to that end. He would particularly welcome information on whether any new plans to combat...
corruption were effective and whether they made specific reference to economic, social and cultural rights.

9. Further information on the results of the National Strategy for Roma Integration 2012–2020 would be appreciated, particularly with regard to social segregation and obstacles hindering the education of Roma children. Similarly, he would welcome information on the results of efforts made to overcome the differences in living standards in rural and urban areas, with particular reference to the high levels of unemployment in minority communities.

10. Noting that the Commission for Protection against Discrimination had a small workforce and a lack of resources, he would be curious to know why the number of complaints it received had declined from approximately 1,000 per year to around 500. He would appreciate information on the country’s potential accession to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), particularly the position of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and how the Constitutional Court viewed the Church’s influence on the accession process. He would also welcome information on steps taken to combat domestic violence.

The meeting was suspended at 3.35 p.m. and resumed at 3.50 p.m.

11. Mr. Sterk (Bulgaria) said that, under the Constitution, the international instruments to which Bulgaria was a party formed part of the national law and were directly applicable. Since the country’s accession to the European Union in 2007, the fundamental treaties of the European Union had been considered to be primary legislation of the Union, meaning that they took priority over other legal acts, at both domestic and European-Union levels. To his knowledge, there had not been any conflict between the provisions of European legislation and those of the international instruments of public international law to which Bulgaria had become a party, including the Covenant. In any case, the practice nationally would be to apply the legal regime that was most favourable to the beneficiaries of the provisions in question. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union generally went further than those of other international instruments and was thus applied with priority. Those rights were also justiciable before the monitoring bodies of the European Union and before the European Court of Justice. They thus provided both material and procedural guarantees of the country’s compliance.

12. Ms. Nacheva (Bulgaria) said that European rules and regulations required that institutions in Bulgaria should submit statistical information on a quarterly and yearly basis. The National Statistical Institute carried out calculations in accordance with European standards, to draw up information on the country’s demographic and economic development. The Institute also drew up midterm and yearly financial forecasts that served as a basis for budgetary preparations. Budgetary units were required to use that framework to present their budget requests for the next year. The parameters used were based on historical data and on various mathematical calculations and economic and statistical calculations for the development of various areas and sectors throughout Bulgaria. The Ministry of Finance provided budgetary forecasts for submission to the Council of Ministers, and ultimately to the parliament. The Public Finance Act included specific definitions for the extent of information required from each public institution and also specified the time frame for submission. Such information was collected in accordance with the European Semester for budget preparation.

13. Ms. Yancheva (Bulgaria) said that at the European level, there were some 100 indicators that were used by all States members of the European Union to report on follow-up to the Sustainable Development Goals. The Bulgarian Government reported such information on a yearly basis.

14. Ms. Rousinova (Bulgaria) said that in recent years the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy and the Social Assistance Agency had invested in upgrading the data-collection system and reliable information was now available on the number of people with disabilities and their needs. That system was connected to the system run by the Agency on Protection of the Rights of Disabled Persons, and efforts were under way to integrate information in the health insurance system and the national insurance institute. The aim was to have a comprehensive information resource that would not only make it possible to determine the number of persons with disabilities and the benefits that they received, but also to draw on
data from the National Employment Agency, so as to match their profiles of skills and qualifications with employment opportunities, while taking into account their specific disabilities and treatments. There were plans to allow open access to the information system in 2019 so that people with disabilities could directly check and update it.

15. The Government had carried out far-reaching reforms to improve support for people with disabilities. The budget devoted to improving the standard of living of people with disabilities and to their integration in the country’s social life amounted to nearly 1 billion leva. Three major legislative acts had been adopted in 2018 and 2019 addressing the situation of people with disabilities and the provision of social services. The 2019 budget for social services was 30 per cent higher than the one for 2018, and funding for services for people with disabilities had increased by about 160 million leva.

16. In 2018, the National Employment Agency had launched a targeted programme for the job placement of people with disabilities. It was estimated that approximately 8,000 persons would benefit from that programme in 2019. People with disabilities worked closely with the local authorities to upgrade the services provided for them, for example through day- and residential-care centres. Two major reforms had been carried out over an extended period for the deinstitutionalization of children with disabilities and for the improvement of care institutions for older persons living with disabilities. There were plans to establish some 160 new daily or weekly care centres in 2019 and 2020, incorporating an integrated and individualized approach to the provision of health, education and social benefits.

17. Ms. Nacheva (Bulgaria) said that the Government maintained a constructive dialogue with NGOs that represented persons with disabilities and that it was working to improve the system for the provision of health services to such persons, for example by integrating information from the National Health Insurance Fund, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. New, more specific instructions were being added to the medical assessment ordinance to provide guidance on the definition of levels of disabilities.

18. Ms. Rousinova (Bulgaria) said that since 2015, the Government had carried out measures to provide access to employment and health and social services for the Roma population. A major effort was under way to progressively reduce the number of people living in ghettos by providing social housing; the Government was also working to include Roma children in the education system by means of language classes, social inclusion measures and steps to prevent dropout. The Government was developing a strategy for early childhood development and was working with 64 local municipalities to include Roma children in the education system, beginning at the kindergarten level, through family support grants. In recent years, investments in education had increased by 10 per cent annually; the Government was bolstering its support for education by raising teacher salaries and investing in school infrastructure in an effort to carry out a genuine reform in education.

19. Measures taken by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Education and Science, the local authorities and the Ministry of Interior had brought some 17,000 children into the education system. The mechanism involved combined social support to encourage families to send their children to school with restrictive measures for those parents who blocked school attendance. Parents who failed to send their children to school lost their benefits and the corresponding resources were rerouted for investment in the local school programme, often as in-kind contributions.

20. Unemployment had been falling since 2015. Between 2017 and 2018 the national rate of long-term unemployment had dropped by 25 per cent, benefitting in particular the Roma population, which had a high long-term unemployment rate.

21. Ms. Stoilova (Bulgaria) said that inclusive education was a priority and that emphasis was placed on ensuring the successful personal development of each child. Children’s individual needs, including their ethnicity, were taken into consideration, but related statistics were not kept. As of 2019, 3.6 per cent of the country’s gross domestic product was spent on education.

22. Ms. Nacheva (Bulgaria) said that the Ministry of Health had introduced a strategy for covering the health needs of people belonging to ethnic minorities; it had also established the
function of health mediators, whose work was funded from the State budget. In 2013, there had been 130 such health mediators in the country. By 2018 their number had risen to 230, for near nationwide coverage. Their work consisted in supporting the population, including in Roma neighbourhoods, and assisting medical specialists who provided services to such beneficiaries. Funds were allocated on a yearly basis for the treatment of indigent persons in medical institutions. An additional budget was allocated by the Ministry of Health for disease prevention, vaccination and maternity care in Roma neighbourhoods.

23. **Mr. Sterk** (Bulgaria) said that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Statistical Institute had begun work on the Government’s report on follow-up to the Sustainable Development Goals; the report was expected to be published within a few years.

24. **Ms. Rousinova** (Bulgaria) said that the Government had adopted a national poverty reduction strategy as part of the National Development Programme: Bulgaria 2020. The two-year action plan for 2019 and 2020 detailed the respective responsibilities of the national and local authorities for implementation and set out the financial contributions to be provided by the various funding sources, either through the national budget or the European Union. One of the most efficient means of fighting poverty was through measures to increase income, and the Government had acceded to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131). The minimum wage in Bulgaria, which was currently about 40 per cent of the average wage, would increase by 10 per cent a year for the next three years, thereby also indirectly influencing average wages. The average wage was also increasing by about 10 per cent a year in general, and much faster in certain sectors, such as information and communications technology.

25. The budget of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy had increased by 6 per cent between 2018 and 2019 and the budget for pensions had risen by 5.7 per cent. Minimum pensions had risen by over 10 per cent since 2018 and were expected to rise by about the same amount in 2019. The scope and amount of social allowances for heating had been expanded. Over 50,000 people regularly received hot lunches from the local authorities, and some 270,000 received food packets twice a year. Home-based services for older persons and for persons with disabilities living in rural areas had been expanded, with some 70,000 people now benefiting from such assistance.

26. **Ms. Nacheva** (Bulgaria) said that health services for older persons and people with disabilities had been upgraded and that, under the Health Insurance Act, health insurance premiums for them, for unemployed persons and for children were paid by the Government. The Ministry of Health also provided subsidies to over 65 hospitals and health-care establishments for the treatment of people living in remote areas. A number of national programmes for the improvement of maternal and child health provided for the distribution of consumables, drugs and vaccinations.

27. **Ms. Spassova** (Bulgaria) said that fighting corruption was one of the main priorities of the Bulgarian authorities. In January 2018, the Government had adopted a comprehensive reform of anti-corruption legislation. As part of that reform, it had established a new, unified anti-corruption agency to verify conflicts of interest and the private assets of high-level officials, to investigate allegations of malpractice and to generally promote the prevention of corruption. The new agency was the result of a merger of existing institutions and was already fully operational. It included law enforcement staff and was competent to assist in the prosecution of suspects of high-level corruption. In March 2018, the former head of the Commission for Illicit Asset Forfeiture had been selected by the National Assembly to head the agency. As the selection of the agency’s management had been done by a simple majority vote in the parliament, it would be important for the management to build a reputation for impartiality and independence. The Government had provided the internal inspectorates of State bodies with expanded powers to verify the interests and assets declarations of individuals. Additional staff had been appointed, new regulations had been put in place and the coordination role of the chief inspectorate, operating under the office of the Prime Minister, had been enhanced.

28. The European Commission had evaluated the country’s anti-corruption measures in its last report under the cooperation and verification mechanism, issued in November 2018,
and had stated that significant progress had been achieved in reforming the judiciary and in combating high-level corruption as well as corruption at the local level.

29. **Mr. Sterk** (Bulgaria) said that the Commission for Protection against Discrimination had 9 full members and was supported by some 90 administrative staff members. He was not aware of any complaints by members regarding their salaries.

30. **Mr. Lashev** (Bulgaria) said that the Commission for Protection against Discrimination was a quasi-judicial body which independently resolved disputes involving complaints of discrimination. Five of its nine members were elected by the National Assembly and four were appointed by the President. The Commission was supported by an administration, which included the chief secretary, general administrators, specialist administrators and legal counsellors. It also had regional representatives, of whom there were currently 25. Its budget for 2017 had been 2.5 million leva, which was more than sufficient for its activity. The Ombudsman received a higher number of complaints because the Commission had a narrower mandate.

31. **Mr. Sterk** (Bulgaria) said that the Commission had received a higher number of complaints in 2018 than in 2017. The issue of the interpretation of gender had arisen in relation to the proposed ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. According to the final judgment of the Constitutional Court, the goals of the Convention largely coincided with the provisions of the Constitution, except for the concept of gender set out in the Convention. Therefore, Bulgaria could not accede to the Convention unless further measures, such as amendment of the Constitution, were taken. Following the judgment, the Government had decided to pursue the major objectives of the Convention through national legislative and law enforcement measures.

32. **Ms. Spassova** (Bulgaria) said that the Criminal Code had been amended with the aim of preventing and combating violence against women and children and domestic violence. Stalking and all forms of physical violence that impaired the life or health of individuals were now specific criminal offences. Higher sanctions were imposed for the breach of domestic violence protection orders. Women who were victims of violence could seek protection and redress by virtue of the Crime Victim Assistance and Financial Compensation Act. The Government envisaged further measures, including improving the system of assistance centres for victims of domestic violence, social services and training of competent authorities in consultation with NGOs and institutional partners.

33. **Mr. Sadi** said that it would be interesting to hear the State party’s views on how it had benefited from six rounds of dialogue with the Committee; it would be particularly useful to have examples of specific, targeted references to the Covenant and to the Committee’s general comments from within the national judicial system. He would like to know more about the specific impact on the State party’s report of the participation by civil society organizations in its preparation. He would appreciate additional information on the main problems of discrimination faced in Bulgaria. How broad were the criteria for discrimination in the country’s legislation, compared to those set out in article 2 of the Covenant?

34. **Ms. Liebenberg** said that she would like to know whether the Government had considered ratifying the Optional Protocol to the Covenant.

35. **Ms. Crăciunean-Tatu**, noting that the delegation had made a distinction between national minorities and ethnic groups, said that she would like clarification of the two categories. She would also like to know whether any specific criteria were applied and how the distinction affected access to rights. She would appreciate information on the current status of minority language teaching in the school curriculum, the development of adequate textbooks and the languages in which they were available.

36. **Mr. de Schutter** said that the statement adopted by the Committee in June 2016, on public debt, austerity measures and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights, had emphasized the duty of States members of international organizations to ensure that the rights of the Covenant were fully taken into account when exercising voting rights and expressing support for certain measures within such organizations. That created a problem for States members of the European Union because its socioeconomic governance,
particularly the European Semester, could lead them to adopt macroeconomic policies that did not allow for the progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights. That was illustrated by the case of 

\textit{Valkov and Others v. Bulgaria}, presented to the European Court of Human Rights in 2011, which concerned pensioners’ rights following austerity measures adopted in Bulgaria. He asked what the Government was doing to ensure that the rights of the Covenant were fully observed within the European Union.

37. Ms. Shin (Country Task Force) said that the unemployment data provided to the Committee had not been disaggregated by ethnicity or nationality. Unemployment was a problem that particularly affected young people, Roma, persons with disabilities and women. Although unemployment had decreased, youth unemployment was two times higher than the average and the percentage of young people who were not in education, employment or training was 15.3 per cent. The percentage of Roma girls and women in that category was as high as 86 per cent. The long-term plan to tackle the problem focused on education for Roma children, but it was not clear what assistance would be provided to the current generation of youth. The report indicated an increase in the number of Roma labour mediators but did not provide information on their actual impact on Roma employment. It would be interesting to learn whether the Government was contemplating any other measures in that regard.

38. She wished to know what percentage of the total population had disabilities and the employment rate for persons with disabilities. A quota system was in place for employment of persons with disabilities but the fine imposed for breaches was very low and the main approach to promoting employment was currently subsidized employment. Without reasonable accommodation and accessibility to buildings, the major reform under way could not be effective. She would like to know what measures the Government would take to make such accessibility possible and whether it had a long-term plan for the participation of persons with disability in the labour market.

39. Over half of people in long-term unemployment were women. The impact assessment on employment training had revealed that the impact was higher for women but remained low. The main problem for all unemployed people was the lack of information on employment opportunities, including in job centres. It would be useful to know more about the system in place for helping people to find employment, how it could be improved and what targeted plans existed for specific groups.

40. Although the national minimum wage had been raised each year and would be further increased, it remained the lowest among European Union countries and was far below the living wage. The main trade union had indicated that the rate should be at least 800 leva, as compared to the current 460 leva. She would like to know whether there was a plan to raise the minimum wage drastically and in which year it was expected to reach the European Union average.

41. The Chief Labour Inspectorate was responsible for preventing and addressing violations of legislation on working hours and breaks. However, the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions had reported frequent violations, including failure to pay overtime work or work performed during public holidays. She would like to know how many complaints the Chief Labour Inspectorate had received and whether the State party considered it capable of performing adequate inspections.

42. The economic participation rate of women was less than 50 per cent and young women struggled to find employment reportedly because it was expected that they would become mothers. Under the national strategy on gender equality, priority areas included promoting the participation of women in the labour market, ensuring women’s economic independence, reducing the gender pay gap and combating gender stereotypes. Strong gender stereotypes appeared to be a direct cause of the low participation rate and were also relevant to the issue of maternity leave and paternity leave. The period of maternity leave was comparatively long at 32 weeks and paternity leave was 15 days. Parental leave of up to 29 weeks could be taken by either parent when a child was 6 months old. Noting that, during all such leave, employees were entitled to 90 per cent of their salary, she would like to know why it was not 100 per cent. Maternity or paternity should be viewed as a social function and childcare was the shared responsibility of the couple. It would be interesting to learn how many fathers actually took paternity leave and parental leave.
43. Despite the Protection against Discrimination Act, the information available to the Committee pointed to widespread sexual harassment in the workplace, especially in the garment sector, as well as low awareness of the issue and a low reporting rate. A fear of dismissal allegedly prevented people from submitting complaints to the Commission for Protection against Discrimination. She would like to know what measures the Government was planning to take in that regard.

44. Although the law had been changed to allow civil servants to strike, the amendment in question did not apply to senior civil servants. According to the International Labour Organization, prohibition on striking was acceptable only in the case of public servants exercising authority in the name of the State. She would like to know whether the Government would be willing to further amend its legislation and remove the final prohibition.

45. Noting that the Government planned to increase the level of social benefits such as old age pension and child allowances annually, she said it would be interesting to learn when the European Union average for such allowances would be reached. Finally, there appeared to be a problem of administrative capacity for the provision of social services to persons in need. For example, it was reported that the social workers who evaluated the individual situations of persons with disabilities were not properly trained and lacked resources. Sometimes they did not even meet the child to be assessed but merely talked to the parents. She would appreciate the delegation’s comments on such reports.

The meeting was suspended at 5.05 p.m. and resumed at 5.20 p.m.

46. Mr. Sterk (Bulgaria) said that reporting to the Committee gave the Government and civil society a regular opportunity to review the situation of rights in Bulgaria and that the dialogue with the Committee fed into the policies of ministries and agencies. Given that many of the rights under the Covenant were also covered in regional instruments, reporting to the Committee was a chance to assess how Bulgaria was performing from the specific angle of the obligations flowing from the Covenant and the Committee’s recommendations. NGOs and civil society as a whole were involved in the reporting process through the National Coordination Mechanism for Human Rights, and their feedback, when not sent directly to the treaty body concerned, was very much taken into consideration. The documents produced by the Government as part of its treaty body reporting obligations were available online.

47. Mr. Lashev (Bulgaria) said that the provisions of the Covenant had been applied by the national courts on a number of occasions. References to the Covenant by the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Court of Cassation and the regional court of Pleven had all been general in nature, as had the references found in the decisions of lower courts. It should be noted that judges, prosecutors, lawyers and other judicial officials had excellent knowledge of the Covenant and referred to it where required.

48. Ms. Spassova (Bulgaria) said that the two main principles guiding the treatment of all minorities in Bulgaria were acceptance, in that each community was free to set the boundaries of its participation in public life, and equal treatment. The Constitution prohibited the State from forcibly assimilating minorities: each community was free to choose and live by its values, traditions and beliefs and its members were treated on an equal basis with Bulgarian citizens. Some minorities were highly integrated while others were less so. In the latter situation, the Government had introduced special measures to encourage integration. The Constitution also safeguarded the right of minorities to learn and use their own language. For example, children could be schooled in Armenian, Turkish, Hebrew and Romani, among other languages. In 2017, over 7,000 children had been studying in a language other than Bulgarian.

49. Mr. Sterk (Bulgaria) said that Bulgaria was committed to acceding to the Optional Protocol to the Covenant. However, it would not do so until all the preparatory work at the national level needed to adequately discharge its obligations and provide the best possible conditions for the functioning of the mechanisms stemming from the Optional Protocol had been completed.

50. Ms. Rousinova (Bulgaria) said that social work was becoming increasingly necessary in Bulgaria; therefore, the Government’s priority was to adopt appropriate laws in that
domain. For instance, a new law on social services, scheduled to enter into force in early 2020, was aimed at changing the financing and types of services provided as well as the approach to social services. In the meantime, the salaries of all social workers had been increased by 10 per cent in 2019. In addition, service providers had been allocated more resources with which to raise salaries. New laws would also be adopted to introduce minimum training requirements and qualifications, oversight and in-service training with a view to ensuring the quality of services. The municipal budget for social services had increased by 30 per cent compared to 2018 and 40 per cent of it was allocated to community- and home-based services.

51. The purpose of the minimum wage was to ensure a basic income for those with the lowest skill level. Less than 10 per cent of the country’s workforce earned the minimum wage. Over the past 10 years, the minimum wage had risen by 155 per cent. It currently stood at 560 leva, or 44 per cent of the average wage, – a similar proportion to the European Union average – and would increase to 650 leva by 2021. As a party to the ILO Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131), Bulgaria adjusted the minimum wage in accordance with inflation and macroeconomic indicators and in cooperation with social partners.

52. Mr. Iliev (Bulgaria) said that, under the Civil Servants Act, the only exception to the right to strike for public servants was high-level management. The exception, which affected a very small number of people, was deemed to be in the public interest and was designed to ensure that Government could continue to function in the event of a strike by more junior staff. Moreover, articles 4 and 11 of the Covenant allowed for limitations on the right to strike.

53. The Chair, speaking as a member of the Country Task Force, said that he would like to know how the State party was addressing the high rate of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion, what the latest figures were on the population living under the poverty line, what tangible impact the National Strategy for Reducing Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion 2020 had had thus far and how the Strategy linked up to the Operational Programme Regional Development. He would be interested in receiving an update on the status of the National Housing Strategy, how the State party was dealing with the large number of people who either did not have housing or whose home was not connected to the water and electricity networks and whether forced evictions were carried out in keeping with international standards. Lastly, he would like to know how successful the efforts to deinstitutionalize children had been, how much the Government allocated to health care and what the situation of mental health was in Bulgaria.

54. Mr. Uprimny, recalling that Bulgaria had had good harm reduction programmes in place until the Global Fund had withdrawn its funding in 2017, asked how the State party intended to compensate for the loss of funding and to increase the coverage of life-saving harm reduction programmes and whether it might consider decriminalizing drug use to prevent the marginalization of users.

55. Ms. Shin asked how the State party dealt with the many persons with mental health problems who reportedly did not have identity papers and therefore could not receive care.

56. Ms. Liebenberg said that she would appreciate detailed information on the conditions in which asylum seekers and refugees were housed and the policy regarding their accommodation during and after processing.

57. Ms. Crăciuneanu-Tatu, noting that the right to self-identification was the cornerstone of the protection of minorities, asked what the conceptual difference was between national minority and ethnic minority and whether the distinction led to differential enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.