STATEMENT

BY H.E. AMBASSADOR STEPHAN TAFROV,
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
IN THE GENERAL DISCUSSION ON A.I. 65 “RIGHTS OF CHILDREN”

AT THE 68-TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY THIRD COMMITTEE

New York, 17 October 2013

Mr. Chairman/Mme Chairperson,

Bulgaria aligned itself with the statement made earlier today by the Deputy Permanent Representative of the European Union and fully supports it. In my statement I will focus on issues of particular importance for my country.

The Bulgarian government is strongly committed to promoting, protecting and fulfilling the children’s rights in all its policies in accordance with the Convention on the Rights of the Child. My country’s efforts are focused specifically on improving the quality of life and well-being of the most marginalized and vulnerable children. Earlier this year Bulgaria has completed its preparation of the joint third, fourth and fifth periodic reports covering the period from 2008 to 2012. The joint report focuses on the implementation of the obligations of Bulgaria under the Convention in the following areas: general principles, civil rights and freedoms, family environment and alternative care, basic health care and well-being, education, recreation and cultural activities and special protective measures.

Mr. Chairman,

Bulgaria has established and largely benefited from the close and productive partnership with UNICEF which aims to achieve greater equity and social inclusion of children, including by reforming and modernizing the child protection sector. This innovative partnership is specifically focused on the most disadvantaged children, including those with disabilities. In the context of the Strategy Europe 20 20 the Bulgarian government approved a National Goal for Social Inclusion along with specific measures aiming, inter alia, to improve
the quality of life of vulnerable children and to promote their social inclusion. Wide range of measures have been developed and enforced, including for gradually closing institution facilities, improving the social service network both at community and family level as well as measures for promoting early child development and providing increased support for families of children with disabilities. Bulgaria remains committed to close all child-care institutions in the course of 15 years in accordance with the National strategy and replace them by a network of community-based services similar to a family environment and more conducive to the individual needs of any single child. Priority in this process is given to the closure of institutions for children with disabilities and of medical and social homes for children of up to 3 years of age. Currently, five projects related to the implementation of the National strategy for deinstitutionalization are being implemented. Since the beginning of 2013, twelve (12) special care institutions have been closed with a view to keeping up with the projected deadline.

In addition, a national program focused on equal access of children with special needs to high quality education and training with a view to their social inclusion has been executed. The objective is to integrate children with disabilities in the mainstream schools and reduce the number of the special education facilities. In 2012 a total of 84 pilot inclusive schools were approved as part of the “Inclusive Education” project.

Mr. Chairman,

The most recent development in our fruitful relationship with UNICEF is the new Action Plan (2013 – 2017) under the current Country Program, which was signed between the Government of Bulgaria and the Agency just 7 days ago, on 10 October 2013. The Plan is focused on critically important goals – increasing the national capacity for social inclusion, reduction of child poverty, improvement of access of marginalized children to education, health care and protection.

Mr. Chairman,

The reform in the child protection sector was challenged by the difficult economic and financial environment and vulnerability of the social system. In these circumstances the UNICEF role in providing advocacy and fostering the multi-stakeholder involvement has been critical, especially in broadening partnerships with the business sector.

In addition to the existing dimensions of their partnership, Bulgaria and UNICEF are currently exploring the possibility of implementing joint development projects in third countries in a mutually-beneficial and efficient way. As a result of the reform efforts, Bulgaria has developed over the years innovative practices in the areas of early childhood care, health and education which were considered potentially viable to become models for other countries in fostering social equity for children. My country already had the opportunity to share and exchange knowledge and experiences with its regional partners during the high-level regional conference entitled “Ending placement of children under three in institutions: support nurturing families for all young children” which took place in November 2012 in Sofia.
Mr. Chairman,

Situated in the immediate neighborhood/close proximity to the escalating humanitarian crisis in Syria, my country is affected by the daily influx of Syrian refugees. Despite financial restrictions, the government has provided additional resources in order to guarantee adequate accommodation and services to Syrian refugees, especially women and children. The Bulgarian authorities are actively engaged in addressing their social, educational and health-care needs. Measures are being undertaken to protect vulnerable refugee children from violence and discrimination and psychological help is being provided to foster their adaptation and integration. In order to respond to the tremendous challenge in addressing the needs of large numbers of displaced persons, the Bulgarian government will continue to rely on the advice and the expert and technical support from the UN agencies, including UNICEF.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.