

**Right of Reply of the Republic of Bulgaria**

**Working Session 11 – Fundamental freedoms I /continued/, including freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, national human rights institutions and the role of civil society in the protection of human rights, and freedom of movement**

**2018 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting,**

**17 September 2018**

Mr. Moderator,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As in previous years, The Lukov March torch bearing procession went ahead in Sofia in February 2018 in spite of an official ban by municipal authorities which was overturned by the court. The court ruling allowed the march on the grounds of the constitutional right to peaceful assembly. Despite the sub-text of the march might be considered as xenophobic and anti-Semitic, the march was held in silence and organizers were careful to warn participants not to display actual Nazi or anti-Semitic regalia.

Unlike in the past, this year the march drew widespread condemnation, in the strongest possible terms, not only from Bulgarian and international Jewish groups, but also from the government, the largest parties in Bulgaria's National Assembly from the ruling majority and the opposition, Sofia mayor and civil society.

Prior to the March the national coordinator for combating anti-Semitism and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs issued an official statement calling the event a "march of hatred" that shows a "non-typical side of Bulgaria". The Ministry of Foreign of the Republic of Bulgaria strongly denounced in a Declaration the event and stated clearly that "Any act of hate and glorification of anti-Semitic and Nazi ideology is absolutely unacceptable. The incitement of intolerance towards the different individual, the preaching of intolerance and the fierce usage of hate speech, are an attempt to undermine democratic values, which we are upholding as a people and as a community."

The government and Sofia Municipality engaged with the Bulgarian Jewish community and civil society organizations in a series of active effort to curb the procession, supported by the WJC and other international Jewish organizations.

The cumulative efforts limited the scope of the event and challenged the assertion of the organizers and supporters of the March that General Lukov was a national patriotic hero and not a pro-Nazi individual. The government has pledged to address the legislative gaps and elaborate an appropriate legal framework to prevent such acts of incitement in the future.

Thank you!