**Statement by Bulgaria**

United Nations Human Rights Council

32nd session of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review

***Review of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia***

24 January 2019

Thank you, Mr. President,

Bulgaria welcomes the distinguished delegation headed by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Andrej Zhernovski.

We would like to highlight the significance of the Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighbourly Relations and Cooperation between the Republic of Bulgaria and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, signed in 2017. It greatly improved the European and Euroatlantic perspective of Skopje.

Bulgaria commends our neighbouring country’s commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights.

We note the efforts of the Government in Skopje to further harmonize the national legislative and institutional framework with the international human rights instruments and to closely cooperate with treaty bodies, established under the UN and the Council of Europe conventions on human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We encourage our neighbours to remain focused on the reform of the judicial system, on the creation of a safer environment for journalists and human rights defenders, on protecting the rights of the child and combatting trafficking in human beings.

Bulgaria would like to make the following recommendations:

1. Ensure that no disadvantage shall result for citizens from the exercise of their right to identify themselves as belonging to any ethnic group.
2. Continue the efforts to fully implement the Law on Equal Opportunities of Women and Men and the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2013-2020.
3. Ensure effective mainstreaming of a human rights-based approach into legislation, policies and budgets that affect young people.

Finally, Bulgaria would reiterate its recommendation that the Government ensure that no impediments to the preservation, expression, and development of cultural identity by all citizens are created.

We wish the Delegation of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia a successful review!

Thank you, Mr. President!