**Third Cycle of Universal Periodic Review of the Republic of Bulgaria**

**Geneva, 6 November 2020**

**Statement of Mrs Karina Angelieva, Deputy Minister of Education and Science**

**Dear Madam President,**

**Distinguished Delegates,**

**Colleagues,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It's a great honor and duty to address you all today under the third Universal Periodic Review for Bulgaria. As my colleagues already informed you to assure resilience and access to inclusive and quality education is of utmost importance for the Government.

This year was remarkable, not only for the unfortunate COVID crisis around the world, but it was memorable because we finally managed, after three very hard years during this government, to finalize the legal basis for the processes and most important factors influencing the quality of education in Bulgaria.

Basically, the adoption of the Law of the Pre-school and School Education gave the framework and the legal base and the push for reform of the education system. But this year, I'm proud to say that we finalized the whole under law regulations and other normative acts, such as the Regulation of Inclusive Education and amendments of the Regulation on the Budget. What is important is the following: We introduced obligatory pre-school education starting from four years olds. We believe that starting earlier preschool education will for sure have a positive influence on dropouts later and overall on the motivation for studying and educating.

It's very important because with the new regulation on the Budget of Educational institutions, we basically amended important articles that regulated and that all education institutions must assure individual approach to those in need, to those from vulnerable groups, from those from socio economic disadvantage groups, including the Roma kids. They have additional budget so that they can use it for appointing additional teachers support or educational mentors or individual approach to catch up with the studying and the competencies necessary for the graduation and basic integration in the school system.

What is very important to stress to you is that for Bulgaria it is very important to take care for all, vulnerable groups regardless of their ethnical origin if they are in need. One of the most important criteria for basically indicate who is from those groups is the lack of education of the parents or the families. That's why we create a new system that is much more inclusive and much more open so that we basically last year encompassed more than 20 000 pupils to receive additional support in school under extracurricular activities or support on languages and maths.

We also introduced the function of educational mentor, and this was extremely helpful because when the COVID-19 pandemic put us in this very strange situation in a way, or I must say challenging situation, we support our educational mentors and teachers very protective equipment, such as suits and masks and they were able to work with this 10 percent of the pupils in our schools that were deprived from distance learning because of lack of technical means. Of course, the Government now is prioritizing after impact assessment of the first COVID measures further investments in digital means, meaning laptops and tablets with priority for those coming from vulnerable groups. And in the same time, we are trying to look forward so that we will be able to catch up after the COVID-19 pandemic and to assure not only skills and necessary level of competencies, but we will be able to assure that we keep the young people interested, motivated and prepared for the labor market and for their personal development.

This is from me, shortly in brief. I would very much like to be with you, but I hope that we will overcome this challenging times and we will be able to meet and to discuss these very important topics within the next year.

**Thank you very much!**