Mr. Chairman,

Allow me to express our high appreciation for your leadership and devotion as chairman of the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems.

The 2017 GGE meeting validated the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons as the proper forum for deliberations on issues and concepts related to the emerging technologies in the area of lethal autonomous weapon systems in the light of technology, military effects and legal and ethical considerations.

Bulgaria aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union and will share the following considerations in national capacity.

We embrace the continuation of the Group’s mandate as it will enable us to advance our discussions on the intricate issue of autonomous weapons systems. The agenda of the current meeting sets the tone for more structured and focused dialogue that would allow us to improve our understanding of LAWS and to evaluate and produce positive outcomes.

Gaining shared perceptions of the scope of the LAWS would require the elaboration of a working definition. The GGE deliberations should lay out characteristics and criteria that a weapon system should meet to be identified as an autonomous one. In our understanding the debate on characterization of the systems under consideration should be concentrated on fully autonomous weapon systems.

Concerning the use of lethal force by autonomous systems, the final decision should belong to a human being as machines could not replace humans in the decision-making process. Human-machine interaction is of paramount importance at the separate phases of development, deployment and use of LAWS, primarily in the targeting cycle.

Human control must be exerted in compliance with the international humanitarian law and international human rights law and its core principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution. State parties unanimously acknowledge that international humanitarian law fully applies to the development and use of autonomous weapons systems. The responsibility for the deployment and use of LAWS on the battlefield and their indiscriminate lethal actions must be maintained by humans in the military hierarchy and by States themselves.
Conducting legal weapon reviews under Article 36 of the Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Convention plays a decisive role in guaranteeing that use and development of lethal autonomous weapons systems strictly comply with IHL norms. Information exchange on Article 36 mechanisms and procedures among State parties would be truly beneficial for improving the level of transparency and confidence building.

Mr. Chairman,

Autonomous weapons systems are still not in existence, yet artificial intelligence and machine learning technologies driven by private companies advance at rapid pace. The work of the Group should not restrict or disrupt the endeavors of academia and industry in research and development of autonomous technologies. Nonetheless the negotiation process within the GGE should not be outrun by developments in related technologies. Advancement in autonomy could have a significant impact on the security environment and relations between States. The security challenges and threats posed by LAWS require the GGE to focus efforts on various approaches in response to them, including practical measures such as exchange of information, sharing best practices and policy guidelines.

Speaking of future steps, I would to like to express the support of the Republic of Bulgaria for the Franco-German proposal for pursuing a political declaration, expressed during the first meeting of the GGE. As its pragmatic character met a widespread approval from different State parties, we believe that the introduced political declaration will give impetus to the deliberations and will act as an important interim step towards more tangible outcomes.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman