



Statement by the First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia Ivica Dacic at the General Debate of the 39th session of the General Conference of the United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization – UNESCO:

"Mr. President of the General Conference,

Mr. President of the Executive Board,

Director General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me at the outset, Mr. President, to congratulate you on your election to this high office wishing you a lot of success in the discharge of these responsible duties. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank your predecessor, Mr. Stanley Mutumba Simataa, for his dedicated and highly successful contribution over the past two years. We also owe our gratitude and appreciation to Mrs. Irina Bokova, who will soon be relinquishing her post of Director General after eight years in office, for the responsible and efficient manner in which she conducted the affairs of the Organization during most challenging times.

The Republic of Serbia remains committed to its position that as an organization with a 72-year long history UNESCO is today perhaps even more relevant than ever. Its unique expertise coupled with determination of the Organization's Member States to take a major step forward

towards preservation of international peace and security through cooperation in the fields of culture, education, science and security, reaffirms UNESCO's noble mission. As always in the past, the Republic of Serbia stands ready to contribute constructively and in close cooperation with other UNESCO Member States to the promotion of the Organization's efficiency.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As a current member of the Executive Board, the Republic of Serbia remains committed, along with other UNESCO Member States, to making continued efforts to achieve visible and sustainable results in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Even more so, since UNESCO is responsible for at least nine Sustainable Development Goals. By implementing its broadly conceived programs with a civilizational dimension, UNESCO makes an invaluable contribution to the promotion of peace and progress of all mankind. Serbia supports the activities UNESCO is carrying out in the context of the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal No. 4 in education, one of the more stable priorities of the Organization. We particularly support the efforts of the Organization to additionally improve opportunities for education of refugees and internally displaced persons. Affected by adverse consequences of a massive migrant wave itself, the Republic of Serbia has invested huge efforts to meet the needs of the most vulnerable segment of the migrant population finding refuge in our country, showing at the same time a high level of solidarity with and empathy for them.

Aware that ignorance breeds prejudice, that prejudice leads to conflicts, which is why special attention should be paid to education as a tool for prevention of all forms of extremism, endangering not only education but also cultural diversity and gender equality. UNESCO should continue to focus on the fight for freedom of thought and expression, especially in the media, ensuring safety for journalists as an indivisible part of that freedom.

I would like to point out that the Republic of Serbia is committed to joint and consistent fight against all forms of violence and extremism in international relations, which is why UNESCO has an important role to play since the spiritual and material values that this Organizations stands for are targeted by violent extremism, including its terrorist forms. We therefore consider that special attention should be given to finding appropriate and efficient methods for the protection of valuable cultural heritage which belongs to all mankind. To that end, we are ready to be actively involved in all projects and concrete activities.

Recognizing the fact that the issue of protection of cultural heritage in war-torn areas remains one of the most topical issues facing UNESCO, we support the promotion of implementation of the international framework existing in this field. The Republic of Serbia welcomes inclusion of culture in the Development Agenda and adoption of UN Security Council resolution 2347/2017 which places the issue of the protection of cultural heritage in the forefront of activities of international organizations and the international community. It is our joint obligation to protect and preserve world heritage for generations to come. The tragic example of Serbia's cultural and spiritual heritage in Kosovo and Metohija is proof how important is the role of UNESCO and its support in the protection and preservation of heritage, particularly at most critical moments. Serbian medieval monasteries in Kosovo and Metohija, four gems of Serbian medieval

architecture of universal value, inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger, have been preserved owing to the efforts of UNESCO. Serbian historical, cultural and religious heritage in Kosovo and Metohija is of immeasurable importance not only for the national identity of Serbia but also as a part of the valuable European and world heritage that needs additional protection.

Sadly, in the past few years, UNESCO itself has been facing many challenges as an organization which greatly impedes its activity in the areas of its responsibility. Serbia calls for de-politicizing UNESCO, since the rising trend of its politicization has threatened the core values the Organization's concept is based upon, thus seriously undermining its reputation and influence in the world. UNESCO needs to serve as a collective vision of a better world and we believe that a solidary approach taken by all of its Member States as well as joint efforts play a decisive role in this regard.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to underline the continuous commitment of the Republic of Serbia to consistent adherence to the UNESCO Constitution and an approach based on dialogue and consensus rather than on unilateralism, in the interest of promoting peace and security through the strengthening of cooperation within the key areas of UNESCO's competence. The core principles of UNESCO, grounded also in the UN Charter and UNESCO Constitution, need to be fully respected with no exceptions, for only in this way can we maintain the existing foreign relations system as well as the universal character of international law.

For this very reason, I would like to stress once again that the Republic of Serbia will continue its commitment against politicization and new divisions, tensions and confrontation within UNESCO itself, as was the case two years ago when an attempt was made at a political affirmation of a non-state entity.

Finally, allow me to congratulate Ms. Audrey Azoulay on her election as the new Director-General of UNESCO. I truly believe that the successful cooperation between the Republic of Serbia and UNESCO will continue during her term of office as well, and that Ms. Audrey Azoulay, as a candidate with vast professional experience in the spheres of culture and information at both national and international levels, will succeed in finding solutions to numerous challenges facing UNESCO as well as in promoting the activity of the Organization as a whole.

Rest assured that the Republic of Serbia will remain a credible and reliable partner of UNESCO in its efforts aimed at strengthening all-inclusiveness and transparency within the Organization and its reform steps reflecting the spirit of the times and reality of the modern world, while reinforcing the strategic goals of the Organization.

Thank you for your attention."