

ADDRESS BY
Bosnia and Herzegovina Minister of Civil Affairs
Mr Sredoje Nović
at the 34th session of the UNESCO General Conference
Paris, 18 October 2007

Dear President of the UNESCO General Conference

Dear Director-General of the UNESCO

Dear Chairperson of the UNESCO Executive Board

Your Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen Delegates

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Before I formally address the prominent guests of today's 34th session of the UNESCO General Conference and greet you on behalf of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Delegation, allow me to first of all warmly greet the new President of the UNESCO General Conference and congratulate him on his appointment to this grand position on behalf of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Dear President, I wish you two years full of enthusiasm, general understanding, success and, most importantly, good results. I am convinced that your personal qualities and experience will be a great asset in fulfilling this important mission.

Allow me to also express my pleasure for being in this temple of both culture and consciousness of the world. For us, people coming from an area not so kindly treated by life, UNESCO is the source of support in solving our problems, for the ideas promoted by UNESCO represent the foundations of our peace and prosperity.

By some sad analogy, all the countries which lacked in dialogue and faced intolerance and bloody conflicts normally see UNESCO and its values as their safe haven.

It is, therefore, not at all surprising that UNESCO first emerged after a great World War. The Constitution establishing UNESCO in November 1945 reflected the international community's hope and faith in a new world, the world of solidarity, dignity, dialogue and respect. The world we dream of even today. UNESCO grew to be a unique place of dialogue between different cultures based on mutual respect and equality.

Many years went by since the creation of UNESCO. Time is passing by but the ideas and the spirit of UNESCO remain intact and always relevant. Moreover, it seems that the role of UNESCO in this new world increasingly loosing the sense of universal values will have to be more forceful than ever.

Because of everything that has happened over the past years, Bosnia and Herzegovina is a country which must fully observe and implement all the ideas promoted by UNESCO. Hence, I wish to, at the very beginning, express our absolute support to the UNESCO Programme 2008-2009 for the fields of education, natural science, social science, culture, as well as communications and information.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is committed to have all the primary UNESCO objectives in those individual fields achieved in our country as well.

Mr. President,

We are currently reforming the education system in Bosnia and Herzegovina to correspond to the requirements of globalisation. At that we also aim to provide "Education for All", respecting differences and especially taking into account the needs of minority groups.

Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I use this opportunity to announce that 5-7 December 2007, UNESCO, UNICEF and OSCE will host "Sub-regional Seminar on Educational Reforms and Education for All (EFA) Goals" in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The seminar will bring together education experts from 11 countries of the South East Europe and we are extremely glad that UNESCO will thus promote its Dakar spirit in our region.

Co-operation in the field of education, exchange of experiences and use of best practices is the road assuredly leading to long-term prosperity of all the countries.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is equally committed to adopt all relevant UNESCO legal instruments and ensure mechanisms for their implementation.

I will avail myself of this opportunity to inform you that Bosnia and Herzegovina has adopted a Decision accepting the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and we have also launched the procedure for admission to the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and other important UNESCO conventions.

Last year, Bosnia and Herzegovina paid special attention to safeguarding and protection of cultural heritage. Following the inclusion of the Mostar Old Bridge into the UNESCO World Heritage List, the overall awareness of the importance of safeguarding and protecting our own heritage increased significantly. This was rewarded by inclusion of the Višegrad based "Mehmed Paša Sokolović" bridge into the UNESCO World Heritage List. This is the same bridge described by our Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andrić in his novel "The Bridge over the Drina River".

Such understanding that we all play a role in preserving our own tradition may result in further expansion of the list and we sincerely hope that this is soon to also include the historical centre of Jajce, Vjetrenica cave and other cultural goods which realistically deserve to be there.

We are aware that in times when the world is growing more and more conscious of the need to preserve cultural values the richness of the Bosnia and Herzegovina heritage may give us a comparative economic advantage if presented as an excellent tourist product.

Co-operation in the field of science is becoming a priority and we intend to rebuild and further development our country's scientific infrastructure. However, we do realize that one must be a part of the global scientific research network to achieve truly great results in this particular domain.

Promoting science and technology related education, building social awareness of the opportunities science and technology offer, building capacities to set science, technology and innovation policies, regional and international co-operation in the key fields of science and technology are just some of our priorities.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Bosnia and Herzegovina and the entire Western Balkans are marked with multi-ethnic and multi-cultural features. Dialogue and co-operation are extremely important for us in order to turn that uniqueness of diversity into a treasure making us recognizable to others.

I am proud to inform you that Bosnia and Herzegovina has just become the host to the South East Europe's Regional Co-operation Council, i.e. the seat of its General Secretariat. This is to replace what was known as the Stability Pact for South East Europe.

This will be a great challenge for the new and improved Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Bosnia and Herzegovina which must strongly contribute to the strengthening of regional stability, prosperity and speedy democratization of South East Europe. However, it also provides all the countries of the region with an opportunity to come together around an important joint goal: living in the world based on constant and persistent effort to find common interests, compromise, co-operation, mutual trust and broad-mindedness.

This is a great chance for our entire region to turn to only those projects which are making the world move forward.

The Stability Pact will start a new life in Sarajevo as of February 2008 in form of the Regional Co-operation Council. We have thus created the best possible framework for any form of co-operation in any given field. We must use this chance to make our lives better, for at this point that depends on us and us alone.

Dear Director-General of the UNESCO,

We are well-aware of the fact that the South East Europe is an area that you and UNESCO as a whole give a great deal of attention to and we would very much appreciate it if you should decide to keep it that way. When it comes to good, useful initiatives there is always room for everyone. Principles promoted by UNESCO are fully compatible with the principles that will be nurtured by the South East Europe Regional Co-operation Council. We suggest to hold a regional conference in Sarajevo next Autumn, attended firstly by UNESCO but also all other organisations and institutions advocating the respect of human rights, freedom of others and ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. It is high time to bring together all the forces and experiences of organisations such as UNESCO and trace a direction for the new spirit to head in order to achieve a certain level of civilisation progress that we may have been immature for up to now.

The building where that spirit of the future will be nurtured bears a symbolic name – the Athens Hall. The name was not randomly picked. As we all know, this powerful daughter of Zeus was a Goddess of wisdom and victory in fight, protector of law and justice.

Let the new and improved South East Europe set that wisdom, peace, law and justice as its primary goals, thus bringing prosperity and wellbeing to all the people living in the region.

Allow me to once again express Bosnia and Herzegovina's commitment to the UNESCO objectives and activities.

Dear President,

I will end this address with another proposal.

It is my impression that one out of a broad spectrum of areas through which UNESCO helps build bridges between people every day has not been explored to its full capacity yet. In our opinion, UNESCO should rely more on it in the future. The area in question is music, a remarkable instrument harmoniously joining people and civilizations.

Music is connecting people from different worlds and traditions in a magical way. Dialogue through music is always turning into a hymn of friendship and respect for others. Through this naturally orchestrated friendship, through dialogue between people of different roots and cultural backgrounds, through richness of harmony, we shall easily spot the architecture of one special world in constant motion, our joint world we build together based on principles of peace, tolerance and respect.

More than ever, Bosnia and Herzegovina is ready to be a part of that world and to show its new face to the world by nurturing all the UNESCO values.

Thank you for your attention.