

STATEMENT
BY FIRST DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA IVICA DACIC IN THE GENERAL DEBATE
AT THE 38TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE
UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL
ORGANIZATION (UNESCO)
Paris, 4 November 2015

Mr. President of the General Conference,
Mr. President of the Executive Board,
Director General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I, first of all, congratulate you, Mr. President, on your election and wish you every success in the discharge of this important post.

The Republic of Serbia truly believes in the noble mission of this Organization, whose 70th anniversary we are observing this year. UNESCO's role in the promotion of universal human values through cooperation in the areas of culture, education, science, information and communications is more important today than it has ever been before. In a world of growing global interdependence, a peaceful intercultural dialogue and exchange are essential to safeguarding international peace and security, and towards achieving overall social and economic progress. The Organization's unique expertise makes UNESCO an important factor in the process of seeking solutions to complex challenges facing mankind at this historical juncture.

Against the background of this responsible role of UNESCO on the international level, it is crucial to preserve – in these troubled and demanding times – the Organization's moral credibility. UNESCO should continue to adhere to its original principles and goals. Politicization of its work is not in the interest of its mission, which is so vitally important to mankind. Any abuse of UNESCO, being also part of the UN system, should not be allowed, especially in the year marking its 70th anniversary. It is not for UNESCO to make political decisions regarding statehood. Moreover, it should not be allowed to put UNESCO at the service of affirming the illegal and unilateral declaration of independence of a part of the territory of a UN Member State, whose sovereignty and territorial integrity are guaranteed by a valid and legally binding United Nations Security Council resolution. This, of course, refers to the application by the so-called "Republic of Kosovo" for admission to UNESCO membership.

I will take this opportunity to recall once again that under UN Security Council resolution 1244, Kosovo and Metohija constitutes a territory of the Republic of Serbia under the interim administration of the United Nations, where the UN Mission – UNMIK continues to be active today. Therefore, it is not a state.

All this testifies to the fact that the application for admission by the so-called "Republic of Kosovo" is unprecedented in UNESCO's history thus far. By opposing this act, Serbia is defending international law, the United Nations Charter and the UN Security Council as the supreme authority for safeguarding international peace and security. These principles must be fully respected, for only in this way will the existing system of international relations, founded on the UN Charter, be preserved, and the universal character of international law maintained.

The session of the UNESCO Executive Board held on 21 October showed not only all the controversial nature of the issue at point but also a deep divide among the Member States.

This is undoubtedly proved by the fact that the absolute majority of 31 out of 58 members of this body, did not effectively endorse the adoption of the recommendation.

In the Organization having as one of the main objectives to protect the cultural heritage of mankind for generations to come, we must not forget that 236 religious and cultural and historical monuments have been targeted in Kosovo and Metohija since June 1999, i.e. after the end of armed conflict, to date. 174 religious sites of the Serbian Orthodox Church, 33 cultural and historical monuments were destroyed, more than 10,000 icons, ecclesiastical art and liturgical objects were stolen. Nearly 5,300 tombstones in 256 Serbian Orthodox cemeteries were destroyed or damaged, and in more than 50 of them there is no entire monument. Still today, four gems of our spiritual and cultural heritage: Decani Monastery, the Patriarchate of Pec, Gračanica and the Church of Our Lady of Ljevis, are inscribed on the UNESCO List of World Heritage in Danger. For all these reasons we are deeply concerned about our cultural and historical heritage in the Province, which is a pillar of our national, cultural and spiritual identity and a part of the precious historical and civilizational heritage of modern Europe and the world.

In addition, I would like to point out that it is neither the intention nor the desire of Serbia to isolate or prevent anyone from having access to the activities of UNESCO. On the contrary. However, the fact is that Kosovo and Metohija participates even now in numerous activities of the Organization, but in a status neutral manner and in accordance with UNSC resolution 1244, which shows best that the true intent of the applicants is solely political.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Serbia is strongly committed to the dialogue with representatives of Pristina, conducted under the auspices of the EU, and being one of the few successful examples of peaceful conflict resolution in the world today. Extremely important agreements have been reached in the framework of the dialogue in the interest of improving the everyday living conditions of all inhabitants of Kosovo and Metohija. Our commitment to this process reflects a strong resolve to actively contribute to the improvement of political and economic stability of the Western Balkans, as well as to solving all outstanding open issues solely by political and diplomatic means. It is with this aim in mind that the Republic of Serbia has demonstrated its constructiveness and willingness to find a compromise in the dialogue. In this way, we have helped reach mutually acceptable solutions for many complex issues in a variety of segments, from justice to energy and telecommunications sectors, in the interest, first and foremost, reconciliation and a common future. Discussions on the property owned by the Serbian Orthodox Church, as well as on the status and protection of Serbian cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija in the Brussels dialogue are yet to be on the agenda.

Taking this as a starting point, I appeal to you. Let us postpone the debate on this issue in UNESCO and let's give dialogue a chance because it is the only way to achieve a mutually acceptable solution on this issue and thereby avoid further divisions, politicization and confrontation with the UNESCO. This approach is also in the spirit of the principles on which the Organization was founded and, we believe, in the best interest of regional stability and cooperation. With your support for the adjournment of the debate, help reach a sustainable solution that will not be the result of unilateralism and imposition, but of a constructive approach and dialogue. That is what we are asking for. A chance for dialogue and agreement, rather than unilateralism. If it comes to a vote, I urge all countries to vote against it, because of the international law. International law is universal, it applies to all. Let me remind countries that would possibly vote for Kosovo, that violation of international law is universal and applies to all as well, and that when their term and the issue of their territorial integrity comes, they will remember what we talked about today. Once again, I urge you to respect the international legal order.

Thank you.