

39 Session of the UNESCO General Conference

Text of the speech by

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Minister of Culture of the Republic of Croatia

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Mr. President of the General Conference,

Mr. Director the Executive Board
Madam Director General
Honourable delegates
Ladies and gentlemen

Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you on behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Croatia for being elected President of the General Conference.

I also wish to thank you, Madam Bokova, for having so keenly advocated for these past challenging eight years towards clearly defining the priorities and implementation of reforms, as well as for strengthening the role of UNESCO within the UN system. We highly appreciate your leadership and achievements.

Let me congratulate Madam Audrey Auzoulay on being nominated by the Executive Board as candidate for the position of Director General and assure her that we are ready to provide full support in her future work. We hope that the circumstances which have led to the financial crisis of the Organization will improve and that the important issues burdening the work of UNESCO will be dealt with through cooperation of all its member states.

We believe it is important to confirm the role of UNESCO with other bodies and agencies of the United Nations and reaffirm its leadership in the area of its competence: education, science, culture and communication. UNESCO plays an important role in translating development goals into concrete action, while ensuring compliance with the efforts of the entire UN system. The 2030 Agenda will lead all UN entities, including UNESCO, into prioritizing their efforts. As part of the Agenda implementation, the European Union and its Member States agreed on a new joint vision of our development policy: the European consensus on development. In this respect, it is very important for UNESCO to continue its reform efforts to further strengthen its capacity to support Member States in their implementation. UNESCO plays a pivotal role in this ambitious venture, not only in Sustainable Development Goal 4 but can contribute also in all 17 goals.

Mr President,

Croatia expresses strong support for the normative work of the Organization. As a member of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Cultural Diversity, we are particularly pleased to be re-elected to its Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

We will continue contributing to the activities of the Cultural Diversity Fund and in promoting cooperation for sustainable development. We highlight the importance of implementing the guidelines for the development of culture in the digital environment, with the primary focus on protecting artists and the diversity of cultural content emphasizing the importance of protecting human rights, in particular freedom of expression, artistic freedom and gender equality.

We support further development of the UNESCO Culture for Development Indicators (CDIS). In cooperation with the UNESCO Office in Venice, the National Commission have conducted a study of CDIS implementation in the Republic of Croatia. We believe that this project will further contribute to promoting policies and strategies aimed at further strengthening production, dissemination, distribution and access to diversity of cultural expressions.

Mr. President,

The Republic of Croatia is proud of its membership in the World Heritage Committee over the past period and will continue to work on the promotion and preservation of world heritage as well as its synergy with intangible heritage as a platform for sustainable cultural development. We also welcome the recent establishment of the Heritage Emergency Fund and the programme of activities carried out through its support, especially because it enabled UNESCO to respond quickly and effectively to crises resulting from armed conflicts and disasters caused by natural and human-made hazards all over the world. We welcome the endorsement by the Executive Board of the Action Plan related to the implementation of the Strategy for the Reinforcement of UNESCO's Action Plan for the Protection of Culture and the Promotion of Cultural Pluralism in the Event of Armed Conflict, as well as the adoption of an Addendum to the Strategy (concerning disasters) and a new Expected Result (ER5) related to Culture in Emergencies Strategy.

We welcome the unanimous support to the Resolution 2347 for the protection of heritage as the first ever resolution adopted by the Security Council to focus on cultural heritage. As a Member State of the European Union we are contributing to the recently launched EU project on the preservation of cultural diversity and heritage in emergency situations. We are looking forward to working closely with UNESCO on the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018, which will be an excellent opportunity to reaffirm our joint commitment to the preservation of cultural heritage.

The Croatian Commission for UNESCO of the Ministry of Culture, together with the Ministry of Science and Education, is continuously working on implementing the manual "World Heritage in the Hand of Youth" into the Croatian education system as well as on organizing seminars for teachers.

As the third signatory to the Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage, Croatia established the International Centre for Underwater Archaeology in Zadar with the aim to provide the possibility of education and capacity building in the field of conservation and restoration of underwater finds and promote international cooperation in this important area of cultural heritage. Let me announce that during the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018 the Zadar Centre will host a conference focusing, among other topics, on the implementation and promotion of the Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage.

Mr. President,

We also recognize the crucial role of education in achieving multiple goals across the 2030 Agenda. We underline the role of education in combating violent extremism and promoting development, security and human rights, and welcome international cooperation in the field of open educational resources. In

the field of education, Croatian priorities are also in line with those of other European states - investing in youth and modernising school and higher education. We are therefore glad to see that UNESCO is now looking for new meaningful ways to engage with the youth in the framework of implementing the 2030 Agenda. UNESCO leadership in Sustainable Development Goal 4 ties in closely with the European Commission's communication on school development and excellence in teaching. In higher education UNESCO new Global Convention on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications has a great potential and we fully support the process of developing, adopting and implementing the Convention. The work of UNESCO on literacy is crucial to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 - UNESCO's role in promoting literacy within the framework of the 2030 Agenda.

When it comes to education, at national level the Government of the Republic of Croatia emphasizes the implementation of the Education, Science and Technology Strategy and the implementation of curricular reform as a priority. The ultimate goal of improved curricula is to ensure for students to be prepared for the challenges arising from technological, economic and social development and to continue their lifelong learning throughout their professional life.

The Republic of Croatia is implementing a series of projects aimed at increasing the digital competences of the education system participants, and at developing multi-disciplinary approach and competences of the 21st century. One of the projects in this field at national level is the e-School project which provides for overall digitization of the education system.

Given the large number of adults who need to acquire basic literacy skills as well as numeric and digital skills, the Ministry of Education is implementing the third cycle of the project "Implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Education", which actively promotes key competencies as the basis for adult education curricula.

In the field of natural sciences, Croatian priorities are aligned with UNESCO activities in the field of sustainable development, in particular ecology and protection of the environment, land and water and biodiversity management strategies.

The Republic of Croatia considers that, although particularly important, the promotion of natural sciences and expansion of capacities in science and education is not the only segment of crucial importance for achieving sustainable development, but that the promotion of social and human sciences, ethics of science as well as democracy and human rights equally contribute to responsible decision-making regarding the future of our planet.

We believe that scientific research should contribute to the prosperity of humanity and preservation of the environment and should be prepared to prevent and cope with natural disasters. As a Mediterranean country, Croatia has a special responsibility to the issue of water and the Adriatic Sea, where more complex measurements are carried out to protect water. Numerous UNESCO activities, the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Committee (IOC); Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS); Global Ecology and Oceanography of Harmful Algal Blossom (GEOBAB), Early Tsunami Reporting Programmes foster all of the above and our experts participate actively in them. Environmental protection in Croatia

does not include only water protection but also land protection and biodiversity management, and in this regard, we also welcome the UNESCO programme Man and Biosphere (MAB).

Mr. President,

We are aware that violence against journalists and impunity for these crimes remains one of the greatest challenges to freedom of expression worldwide, with particular threats faced by women journalists. Protecting and promoting freedom of expression, including media freedom, goes to the core of UNESCO mandate. We are determined to support UNESCO in keeping its role of champion in promoting the safety of journalists - which constitutes an indispensable precondition to freedom of expression and the media.

We welcome the Global Report on world trends in freedom of expression and media development, which highlights key changes in the media landscape over the past few years, such as spreading unverified news, increased cyber harassment and hate speech, as well as constant threats to the physical and digital safety of media workers.

Croatia and the Croatian Commission for UNESCO actively cooperate with all countries in Europe and the world and would like to continue supporting the role of the UNESCO Venice Office in fostering cooperation in Central and South East Europe. As confirmation of good cooperation, we point out successful conferences, expert meetings and ministerial conferences to the organisation of which the UNESCO also participated, as well as a number of other major and smaller initiatives aimed at ensuring the continuity of cooperation and synergy of all current activities and the promotion of UNESCO goals. I wish to particularly emphasize the important role of the commissions in cooperation as well as catalysts of UNESCO ideas and priorities in the very countries.

In the forthcoming two-year period we hope to expand the scope of regional cooperation, cooperation in Europe and beyond, as well as new innovative projects in the field of education, science and culture aimed at promoting peace and stability in this and all other parts of the world.

UNESCO should regain its position on the international scene and reinforce its responsible multilateral governance focused on young generations, education, culture, science and sustainable development. We need more than ever a strong, independent, dynamic, innovative and digitized UNESCO as a global forum for debate and dialogue, which will tackle all relevant issues of humanity, ensuring social justice and preservation of our planet.

Thank you.