



39th UNESCO General Conference

EU statement in the General Plenary Debate, 6 November 2017

Madam President of the General Conference,

Mr President of the Executive Board,

Madam Director-General,

Distinguished colleagues,

1. I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and the Candidate Countries Turkey, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania¹.

2. Global challenges require multilateral efforts. Global governance for the 21st century is one of the strategic priorities that the EU has defined in its Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy. Effective multilateralism, with a strong UN at its core, lies at the heart of our interests and of our commitment. The EU and its Member States conveyed a strong message of support to the UN at the opening of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly last September.

3. The EU's commitment to the UN translates into an aspiration to transform, rather than simply preserve, the existing system. We support the UN Secretary General in his vision for the UN and its reform. We believe the Secretary General addresses the key issues in order to have a UN that is fit for purpose and able to effectively tackle the challenges of our times.

4. Education, culture, support to freedom of expression, youth empowerment and intercultural dialogue are crucial soft diplomacy tools to achieve peace and sustainable development. We therefore see UNESCO as a pillar of the multilateral system. Our support to UNESCO will not falter. The EU remains its close partner through political support to its objectives as well as support to make them a reality - the EU Member States continue to be collectively the largest contributors to the regular budget of UNESCO, and the EU and its MS continue to be its largest voluntary donors.

5. We congratulate Audrey Azoulay on her nomination by the Executive Board and look forward to the nomination of the next UNESCO Director-General by the General Conference this week.

6. We affirm our readiness to work closely with the next Director-General to help focus the mission of UNESCO on areas where it has unique competence and can provide added value, to further enhance the confidence of the membership in the organisation through dialogue and outreach to all actors, as well as to continue reforms for a modern and accountable organisation. As part of the UNSG's broader work to reform the UN system, we expect UNESCO to work in cohesion with the UN family in pursuit of the goals on today's multilateral agenda.

7. The 2030 Agenda should guide all UN entities, including UNESCO, in prioritising their efforts in an integrated manner. The recently agreed New European Consensus on Development provides to the EU institutions and the EU Member States with a new common framework for development policy, in which we will be working together with our partner countries toward the implementation of the Agenda.

8. L'éducation figure toujours parmi les priorités de l'UE, avec un soutien à des politiques efficaces en matière d'éducation, de formation professionnelle, de perfectionnement des compétences et d'accès aux technologies numériques. Nous apprécions le rôle actif joué par l'UNESCO dans la mise en œuvre de l'objectif de développement durable n°4. L'UE continuera à œuvrer en partenariat avec d'autres acteurs, notamment en prenant une part active au comité directeur ODD-Education 2030 installé dans les locaux de l'UNESCO, afin d'assurer un soutien plus coordonné à la réalisation des cibles et engagements en matière d'éducation mondiale.

9. L'UE poursuit la mise en œuvre de sa stratégie en matière de relations culturelles avec ses pays partenaires, qui se base sur le nouveau paradigme de la coopération et du partenariat. Nous visons le renforcement d'un espace commun où les acteurs culturels puissent se rencontrer et produire ensemble une culture de dialogue. En 2018 l'UE célèbrera l'Année Européenne du Patrimoine, attirant l'attention du monde entier sur ce bien essentiel pour la civilisation humaine toute entière. Nous comptons sur les compétences et le savoir-faire de l'UNESCO pour approfondir notre coopération déjà très intense en ce domaine.

10. Le patrimoine culturel mondial requiert également une protection dans le cadre de nos politiques étrangères. Le patrimoine culturel peut contribuer à la paix, la sécurité et la réconciliation, à renforcer la résilience d'un pays, ainsi qu'au tourisme et à la croissance économique. De plus, la culture ouvre de nouvelles voies, facilite la compréhension mutuelle et concourt à la prévention de la radicalisation. L'UE poursuivra son étroite collaboration avec l'UNESCO et tous les partenaires clés afin de protéger le patrimoine culturel et la diversité culturelle, également en cas de conflit.

11. En qualité de partie à la Convention de l'UNESCO de 2005, l'UE promeut activement la diversité des expressions culturelles – dans nos politiques internes, notamment à travers les récentes propositions de réforme du droit d'auteur pour l'environnement numérique, dans nos accords commerciaux, économiques et politiques avec des pays tiers et dans notre coopération avec les pays en développement.

12. We attach the highest priority to promoting and protecting freedom of opinion and expression, free, diverse and independent media and the safety of journalists and other media actors, including those who use new media to reach a mass audience. The EU condemns any acts of violence, intimidation or harassment against journalists and other media actors, and supports projects on media freedom, including to provide targeted protection through Human Rights Defenders programmes. Freedom of expression is not an end in itself. It is a foundation for democracy, transparency, accountability, inclusive development and finally peace and stability.

13. The prevention and countering of violent extremism is a core objective of the EU's external counterterrorism efforts. The EU places importance on ensuring that our efforts in this area align with and advance the UN's Global Counterterrorism Strategy and in particular the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. The EU commends the work of UNESCO in this field.

14. The EU supports young people's transition to adulthood, including access to life skills, integration in the labour market, social inclusion and participation in social and civic life, as part of a strategy based on constant dialogue with the youth sector. This strategy is backed by a number of funding schemes, primarily Erasmus+, the programme for education, training, youth and sport in the EU, neighbouring countries and the rest of the world.

15. Youth is a priority for EU's external action in the framework of implementing the 2030 Agenda as well as in conflict prevention and sustaining peace. Our approach is focused on the promotion of the capacities and youth initiatives in the area of peacebuilding. We will pursue this priority through initiatives ranging from support to the implementation of UNSCR 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security to focusing the 5th Africa-EU Summit this November in Abidjan on "Investing in Youth"; and to the EU High Representative/Vice-President's initiative to promote exchanges about youth agency between the EU and its Southern Neighbourhood.

Thank you.

¹ *The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process*