

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 NATIONS
EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION – UNESCO

Paris, 1 November 2017

Madame President of the General Conference,

Mr. President of the Executive Board,

Madame Director General,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you Madame President 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 Madame Bokova, who will soon be relinquishing her post of Director General after eight years in office, for the responsible and professional 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 as well as 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 contributes 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.

Knowing that ignorance breeds prejudice, that prejudice leads to conflicts, 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 Organization 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 improvement of implementation of the legal 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 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. By inscribing them to the List of World Heritage in Danger, four gems of Serbian medieval cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija of universal value are preserved, but hundreds of goods are still endangered. 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 primary responsibility. Serbia advocates for de-politicizing of 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 the system of international relations can be improved as well as international law preserve its universal validity.

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 in an attempt of international political affirmation of a non-state entity.

Finally, allow me to congratulate Madame Audrey Azoulay, nominee for the position of Director-General of UNESCO. I truly believe that the successful cooperation between the Republic of Serbia and UNESCO will continue during her term in office as well, and that Madame Azoulay 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 of 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.