

ADDRESS / STATEMENT

**40th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO
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D E P U T Y P R I M E M I N I S T E R

O F T H E R E P U B L I C O F S L O V E N I A

M I N I S T E R

**O F E D U C A T I O N , S C I E N C E A N D S P O R T
O F T H E R E P U B L I C O F S L O V E N I A**

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**Madame Director General,
Mr President of the General Conference,
Dear Chair of the Executive Board,
Excellencies, distinguished Colleagues,**

We live in a time of immense transformation. The Republic of Slovenia remains committed to its position that UNESCO as an organization with a 74-year tradition, is today, perhaps, even more relevant than ever before. Its unique expertise coupled with determination of UNESCO's Member States to take a major step towards the preservation of international peace and security through cooperation in the fields of education, science and culture, reaffirms UNESCO's major mission. As always, Slovenia stands ready to contribute constructively and in close collaboration with other Member States to the promotion of UNESCO's core missions.

Please allow me to briefly reflect on Slovenia's key priorities during our mandate in UNESCO's Executive Board in 2015 – 2019, which were, in our view, more than successfully accomplished:

Firstly, Slovenia remains a strong advocate of multilateralism with the United Nations at its core; its preservation should be our common overarching priority. UNESCO deserves an important place in this endeavour.

Secondly, we should refocus our priorities to the paramount mission of UNESCO: education, science and culture should all be strengthened. I would like to underline that UNESCO should continue to reposition itself as an intellectual power within the UN System and should more extensively consult professional experts from Member States. We should respect, cherish and foster a bottom-up lead approach coupled with a strong commitment to evidence-based policy making in all phases of UNESCO's decision making.

And thirdly, we should be mindful of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as all challenges and sustainable development goals can only be met by joint efforts.

Slovenia remains committed to achieve visible and strong results in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Even more so, since UNESCO is responsible for at

least nine Sustainable Development Goals, we fully support UNESCO to take the lead with regard to the implementation of SDG 4. Together, we can develop new approaches and methods for their effective and most useful outcomes.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In this regard, I would like to recall the importance of Open Educational Resources (OER). Slovenia was leading – together with UNESCO and other international institutions and the inclusion of experts worldwide – the drafting process for the UNESCO Recommendation on OER to be adopted during this session of the General Conference. We are looking forward to a transparent, effective and efficient way of implementation of this important standard setting instrument.

The OER Recommendation will be an official UNESCO policy instrument that will both advise national governments on how to support open education in their countries and report on those efforts. The Recommendation presents an historic opportunity for all – OER producers, users, educational institutions and others in the open education community – to work with national governments to help them understand and implement open education recommendations in their countries. Slovenia and many partner countries and international organizations will actively support its implementation to leverage this opportunity to meet the SDG4 goals.

Furthermore, Slovenia fully recognizes UNESCO's new efforts in the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and in particular in its ethical dimensions. The development and application of AI technologies will profoundly shape humanity's access to information, knowledge transaction processes and education. AI carries great potential to foster open and inclusive knowledge societies, especially for marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, rural populations, and indigenous peoples, to promote open access to education, digital persistence, cultural diversity, and scientific progress. Let's not forget that with great potential comes great responsibility. And it is the responsibility of the Member States to jointly adopt policy measures that will ensure that AI's potential is used for the benefit of all, rather than the few. AI is one of the central challenges of the era of converging technologies with profound implications for human beings, cultures, societies and the environment. AI is likely to transform the future of education, science, culture and communication.

In this light, the Slovenian Government proposed the establishment of an International Research Centre on AI under the Auspices of UNESCO, which received the support of all Member States of the Executive Board at its session in April. Let me take this opportunity to once again call on the respected representatives of the Member States for your support during this General Conference when the final decision will be adopted.

The full implementation of the ongoing Strategic Transformation must remain the top priority of the Organization in the upcoming years and we look forward to continuously and closely working together with the Director General, the Secretariat and with you, distinguished colleagues and delegations, to whom I express my sincere gratitude for all of your active cooperation and commitment. Slovenia is very satisfied of UNESCO's open and flexible approach with an emphasized mutual and transparent way of communication with its Member States in this framework.

As noted before, Slovenia is committed to promote strong and effective multilateralism with the UN. Bearing in mind the constitutional nature and role of UNESCO within the UN System, we all have to resist any attempts that intend to weaken Human Rights and we should keep the human based approach as well when following decisions in the framework of the Strategic Transformation.

Slovenia is active with its constant request to prioritize UNESCO's activities in line with its financial resources according to expected results and impact on the people closely following the implementation of the SDGs, therefore our work is focused on UNESCO's Medium-Term Strategy (40 C/4).

At this session of the General Conference, we look forward to the budget for 2020-2021 being approved and further, it is my great honour and pleasure to inform you that the Government of Slovenia supports the Director General's proposed scenario of "Zero Real Growth" of UNESCO's budget.

I welcome the positive new dynamic that was evident since the last session of the General Conference. We observed how the Director

General and the Secretariat faces a considerable task, how that task would not have been achieved overnight nor would it be delivered easily. However, I would also like to offer congratulations to the Director General and her team for what has been achieved. UNESCO is now more visible than it was 2 years ago. There is a sense of direction and ambition for the future. Although challenges remain, UNESCO's finances are on a sounder footing and there is a renewed sense of optimism for the future.

Whilst our Permanent Delegation represents our capitals' views here at the seat of the organization, the Slovenian National Commission is representing the organization to Slovenia. Perhaps the most visible demonstration of UNESCO for Slovenian nationals can be found in the 24 UNESCO designations we have. These continue to thrive. They are often run by unique grassroots organizations, contributing to the local and national economy and, they are a tangible connection for local communities with UNESCO.

Coming from national to regional objectives and commitments, I underline that all remarks expressed in my national capacity are aligned with the statement made on behalf of the European Union.

In conclusion Mr President: we must all look to what we can do to play our part. UNESCO cannot simply take on everything so we must focus on the mandate and where UNESCO is uniquely placed to deliver – now and in the future. Slovenia looks forward to being part of that journey and supporting UNESCO's efforts.

Thank you for your attention.