



REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA

**Edmond Ademi, Government Minister /President of the National Commission for
UNESCO, Head of the Delegation of North Macedonia to the 40th Session of UNESCO
General Conference**

Paris, November 2019

Distinguished President of the General Conference,

Distinguished Director-General of UNESCO,

Distinguished Chairperson of the Executive Board,

Distinguished Heads of Delegations,

Dear Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It's an honor and pleasure for me to address the 40th General Conference of UNESCO on behalf of the Republic of North Macedonia.

1. The Republic of North Macedonia has always strived to realize active and constructive cooperation with the Organization and other member states within the framework of its membership in UNESCO and in the spirit of the mutual commitments.

Our country's full support and commitment to UNESCO's goals are reflected in the concrete activities that we have implemented so far.

North Macedonia continues to give special importance to its membership in this organization, throughout its independence and in particular the last few years, in the context of the deep and comprehensive changes our country is undergoing.

These changes are redefining our political stands and our position on the world stage. The reforms are hard, often painful, and they come with a high political cost. We are determined to push them through, and to become active participant in all integrative and cooperation processes. North Macedonia is often mentioned as a success story and this is something, I believe we can be proud of.

We are returning to the international stage with participation and activities in international bodies, including UNESCO. Since 2016, North Macedonia has sought to have an active role in Organization's processes, as a part of our orientation towards functional multilateral cooperation.

2. North Macedonia is fiercely committed to multilateralism and inclusive dialogue, that being said UNESCO became one of the key political priorities of our foreign policy, along with our Euro-Atlantic integration.

I would like to reaffirm our commitment to the values and the decisive universal role of UNESCO in the areas of culture, education, science and communication. We are boosting our involvement in many of these areas, as a tool to achieve peace and sustainable development.

As our experience in signing the Prespa Agreement shows, inter-state relations and politics could open the door to wider contacts and cooperation, including the cross border cooperation in the fields of our common cultural and natural heritage, especially its preservation of the Prespa Lake region (with Greece and Albania) and the Ohrid Lake region (with Albania).

Ladies and Gentleman,

3. The United Nations' development goals reflects a clear idea of what a world deprived of poverty should look like, what is necessary to be done in order to preserve our planet for future generations and secure a better life for all; by guaranteeing quality education accessible to any individual, intercultural dialogue and insisting on rich multilateral cooperation.

In the context of education, our Government supports an inclusive approach in the implementation of education policies. One of the key priorities is to provide education to children with foreign citizenship or stateless children on an equal basis with our citizens and to reform the secondary education in order to meet the needs of the labor market. Allow me to also highlight North Macedonia's legislation guaranteeing the right to study in their mother tongue up to university education for each student coming from an ethnic group other than the majority.

Furthermore, we firmly believe that education on human rights or climate change is *sine qua non* in building long term harmonious relations between different ethnic, religious or cultural groups. „*The ignorance of each other's ways and lives*” the preamble of the UNESCO Constitution states „*has been a common cause, throughout the history of mankind, of that suspicion and mistrust between the peoples of the world through which their differences have all too often broken into war*”.

Having into consideration the necessity of educating for democracy, a few months ago our Government prepared a plan to combat misinformation and attacks on democracy. As part of this approach, there is an Action Group, which will coordinate state institutions in the fight against misinformation.

North Macedonian Government remains deeply committed to achieving these goals, through its national policies, but also to co-operation with UNESCO and other member states.

I am confident in the belief that the unity and joint decision-making of Member States on key issues within UNESCO's competence can facilitate the resolution of all issues addressed by UNESCO. Allow me to quote Dag Hammarskjöld in this context: „*Everything will be all right (...) when people, just people, stop thinking of the United Nations as a weird Picasso abstraction and see it as a drawing they made themselves*“.

Dear Ladies and Gentleman,

4. I am delighted to reiterate our commitment and the concrete steps towards preservation of the cultural and natural heritage of the Ohrid region, in line with the Government's priorities, within the framework of the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, the relevant suggestions of UNESCO and in harmony with the national legislation for legal protection of natural and cultural heritage, including the fact that the old city of Ohrid is declared a cultural heritage of a particular importance for North Macedonia.

In the period after the 39th and prior to the 40th Conference, the Government and other institutions involved gave high priority to the implementation of the relevant UNESCO conventions.

The Republic of North Macedonia participated in UNESCO and EU joint initiative “Towards strengthened governance of the shared trans boundary natural and cultural heritage of the Lake Ohrid region”. The project aimed at building a participatory process for integrated management planning and the preparation of a dossier by the Albanian authorities to extend the World Heritage Property to the Albanian part of the Lake Ohrid region.

In this regard, North Macedonia strongly supported Albania's Nomination Dossier for Inscription on the World Heritage List and is welcoming the decision of the World Heritage Committee (Baku, 2019) to approve boundary modification of the “Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Ohrid Region”, as proposed by the Republic of Albania. Along with the efforts of the institutions of the city of Ohrid and the Government, we believe that this is an additional guarantee in conservation of the outstanding universal value of this city and its surroundings.

With respect to activities related to the implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Republic of North Macedonia, it is especially important to point out that in 2018 a field visit by independent experts was conducted

in North Macedonia (from UNESCO and our country), with the aim of preparing the three-year Implementation Strategy for the said Convention.

In order to implement the UNESCO Conventions on Cultural Heritage, by the end of 2019 and with the help of UNESCO Regional Office for Science and Culture we are planning to hold a sub regional workshop on combating the illicit trade in cultural heritage.

I am exceptionally pleased to mention our fruitful cooperation with UNESCO's regional office for science and culture in Venice. Our country wishes even stronger UNESCO and with ever greater presence in the Balkans, for which I'm sure of the clear and strong political will in the region, especially in the context of enhancing intercultural understanding/overcoming historical prejudices and misunderstandings

At the same time, we are systematically strengthening the capacity of the National Commission for UNESCO, not only through formal decisions and procedures but also through substantive steps. The Commission is continuously working (in political and operational terms) with all relevant Government institutions as well as the UNESCO.

The Republic of North Macedonia remains deeply committed in promoting our shared values and work together with the Organization and other member states on the key challenges facing UNESCO and the UN.

Thank you!