

40 Session of the UNESCO General Conference

**Text of the speech by
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Minister of Culture of the Republic of Croatia**

Paris, 18 November 2019

Distinguished director general, Mrs. Audrey Azoulay,
Distinguished president, Mr. Ahmet Altay Cengizer,
Distinguished heads of delegations of Member States of UNESCO,

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour to attend the 40th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO. Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you on behalf of the delegation of the Republic of Croatia for being elected the President of the General Conference.

Today, on 18th November Croatia commemorates the victims of Vukovar as well as all victims, civilians and soldiers killed during the Homeland War. Our recent experience when we were forced to defend our country, but also our cultural heritage reminds us how important it is to work on building peace, promoting tolerance and enhancing international solidarity – all principles and values that UNESCO stands for.

The Republic of Croatia supports the initiatives undertaken by UNESCO's Director-General, Mrs. Audrey Azoulay, particularly the efforts related to the strategic reform and the financial consolidation essential for the efficiency and effectiveness of the Organization in carrying out its mandate, as well as national, regional and international projects that foster UNESCO's global priorities.

We wish to see a human rights-based approach in all sectors for the full mandate of UNESCO. In circumstances when the advocacy and protection of human rights are challenged, we expect UNESCO's leadership to be a strong and proactive voice, in particular in the field of right to education, freedom of expression, and safety of journalists.

Along with other ministerial and high-level meetings, we congratulate you for organizing the Forum of Ministers of Culture as a part of the 40th General Conference. We are looking forward at the discussion on the important contribution that culture, cultural heritage and cultural diversity give to sustainable social and economic development of contemporary societies as well as to the quality of human life, in accordance with the 2030 Agenda.

The Republic of Croatia places great importance on the preservation of heritage and considers the Convention concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage as one of the most valuable normative instruments of UNESCO.. As a country experienced in post-war restoration of destroyed cultural heritage, Croatia was the first country to contribute to the Fund for the restoration of destroyed cultural heritage sites in Mali. We will continue sharing our expertise and assisting, where possible, with the protection of endangered world heritage sites. The Republic of Croatia will support UNESCO's major efforts in the reconstruction of the spirit of Mosul in Iraq that was announced earlier this year by our Prime Minister Mr. Andrej Plenković.

Croatia continues to promote art and cultural heritage education through a major UNESCO project, "World heritage in young hands". As part of the European Year of Cultural Heritage, the Croatian Commission for UNESCO hosted in Zadar the European Youth Forum. The Forum gathered young professionals with the aim to promote education on world heritage. We particularly welcome youth inclusion and empowerment as one of the main transversal issue of this General Conference.

Croatia strongly supports effective implementation of other UNESCO's normative instruments in culture. We are committed to the promotion of the 2003 Convention on Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage. We are encouraging the multinational nominations and are working with partner countries on presenting new candidacies as well as promoting and safeguarding phenomena already inscribed in national and UNESCO registry.

Through the International Center for Underwater Archeology in Zadar, a category II center under the auspices of UNESCO, Croatia strongly promotes the ratification and implementation of the 2001 Convention.

We are proud to have given our contribution to the creation of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions as well as to the work of the Intergovernmental Committee where we have been elected in 2017 for the second time.

Following the national workshop on risk management of World Heritage sites, including biosphere reserves, organized by the Croatian Commission for UNESCO in cooperation with the UNESCO Office in Venice in September 2017 in Jelsa on the Island of Hvar, the Republic of Croatia will in 2020, during the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, host the conference on risk management in cultural heritage. Although aimed at enhancing EU cooperation, the conference will feature initiatives and projects launched by different international organizations including UNESCO. Following recent fire in Notre Dame or floods in Venice, as well as many other threats to cultural heritage, it is obvious that we need to intensify our collaboration on this issue.

Mister President,

When it comes to education, implementation of curricular reform for the Croatian Government is the top priority. Comprehensive curricular reform that we have undertaken, focuses on developing basic competences for lifelong learning, increasing students' functional literacy level, linking education to students' interests, life experience, needs and opportunities, linking education to the needs of society and economy; ensuring greater autonomy for teachers in the choice of content, methods and forms of work, but also encouraging the use of teaching and learning methods that allow students to play an active role in the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes with the support of teachers and interact with other students. The design, planning, monitoring and evaluation of experimental program has a practical and scientific component.

For the first time a universal agenda, adopted by all Member States of the United Nations in 2015, recognises the role of higher education to address critical current issues and challenges. The implementation of the National Plan for Enhancing the Social Aspect of Higher Education in the Republic of Croatia for the period 2019–2021 shall enable systematic collection and processing of data relevant for improving the financial aid system for members of under-represented and vulnerable groups, allow equal opportunities to all students during their studies, and raise the studies completion rate and the employment rate for under-represented and vulnerable groups after graduation.

Additionally, the standards concerning the improvement of the social dimension will be implemented in the system for ensuring high quality tertiary education.

This year the Republic of Croatia has joined the CERN family as an Associate Member. We are promoting research, science and innovation throughout school curricula aware that the critical thinking that comes with science education is vital to train the mind to understand the world in which we live, make choices and solve problems.

With regard to the adult education system in Croatia, we are focused on enabling access to education, acquiring qualifications and retraining qualifications, as well as on connecting adult education to the labour market. Modernising adult education focuses on applying computer systems, developing e-learning models, as well as tailoring adult education programmes to the needs of various target groups—persons with lower qualifications, socially marginalised and excluded people, the disabled, the elderly, and immigrants.

We welcome Global instrument for the ethics of artificial intelligence taking into account UNESCO's expertise in the field of science and technology ethics and bioethics as well as UNESCO's universal perspective and multidisciplinary approach; right environment of trust for the successful development of AI, in full respect of fundamental rights, especially human autonomy and the right to privacy should be emphasised.

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.

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. Our experts have participated in the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Committee (IOC); Global Ocean Observing System (GOOS); Global Ecology and Oceanography of Harmful Algal Blossom (GEOBAB), Early Tsunami Reporting Programmes.

At the end, I would like to highlight good cooperation that we have with the UNESCO Regional Office in Venice and the antenna office in Sarajevo.

As part of the efforts to build a modern, relevant and forward-looking organization, we appreciate the work undertaken on recent initiatives aiming at better preparing UNESCO for the new and future challenges, in the field of Open Science, Future of Education, Artificial Intelligence - landmark for a new and visionary UNESCO.

We look forward to successful future cooperation on many joint projects and initiatives, especially cross-border ones that motivate international cooperation and intercultural dialogue.

Thank you.