

210th session of the UNESCO Executive Board
Statement of the Head of the delegation of the Republic of Belarus

December 3, 2020

Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board,
Madam Director General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen.

On behalf of the Republic of Belarus, I am glad to welcome the participants 210th session of the UNESCO Executive Board. We are grateful to Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board for resolving the organizational issues of holding this session in the difficult conditions of the persisting pandemic.

We also thank the President of the General Conference, the Director-General of UNESCO and the entire secretariat of the organization for ensuring the smooth and efficient operation of the Organization and for contributing to this session.

The agenda of the current session of the Executive Council is very rich. I will dwell on certain points.

Our organization is undergoing the **strategic transformation**. We welcome the final report by the Director General on this matter. At the same time, we call for the maximum involvement of member states in the process. In general, we support the proposed decision of the Executive Board.

Fieldwork is an important tool for the entire UNESCO system. The Association of UNESCO Clubs, which unites 58 clubs, plays a prominent role in Belarus. The National Commission for UNESCO participated in consultations on progress in the application of the regulatory framework. According to the recommendations of UNESCO, all decisions on the creation and liquidation of UNESCO clubs are taken collectively, taking into account the opinion of the National Commission of the Republic of Belarus for UNESCO, whose representative is a member of the Board of the Association. In their work, the Belarusian UNESCO clubs are increasingly using modern information technologies. They use the educational portal EDU-HAB, which hosts free webinars on youth policy, promoting healthy lifestyles, implementing the UN sustainable development goals, etc.

We consider the **Participation Program** a unique instrument of interaction with UNESCO. Belarus has submitted 7 applications under the Participation Program for 2020 – 2021. They are currently under consideration. We look forward to their speedy approval by the secretariat. We are confident that this format of work makes UNESCO “visible” to

ordinary people. UNESCO is perceived as an organization that provides concrete assistance in solving pressing problems.

We would like to note the importance of the Organization's activities within the framework of the "**Man and Biosphere**" program. This is one of UNESCO's key programs and is relevant in the context of achieving SDGs 13 and 15. Belarus is an active participant in the program, and we call on all Member States, partners and donors, especially in connection with the 50th anniversary of the MAB program in 2021, to intensify their participation in its implementation. We are also ready to support the initiative of the Spanish MAB Committee to declare the Day of Biosphere Reserves, which will help to popularize the activities of this program.

We consider the work on the draft Guidelines on **Ethical Aspects of Artificial Intelligence** to be very useful and promising. Positive note the position of Director-General of the initiative on this issue. We want to emphasize that the consultation process on this issue should take place as much as possible is inclusive, involving all interested states.

I would like to dwell in more detail on the basic value of UNESCO's activities. Today, humanity is faced with an epidemiological crisis unprecedented in the last hundred years. There are different forecasts on the timing of its completion, but it is still difficult to predict the depth of the economic crisis that has already begun. Today, more than ever, all countries must show mutual support, respect and tolerance. Needless to say, in these crisis conditions, any kind of conflict is simply destructive. It is unacceptable to support old conflicts and it is criminal to create new "fault lines". Belarus, like many member states, has always been and will continue to oppose any politicization at the UNESCO site. We fully support your yesterday's appeals, Mr. Chairman.

The Belarusian delegation listened attentively and took note of the statement by the representative on behalf of the EU. On a procedural basis, I fully support yesterday's remarks by Russia and Venezuela on point of order of the Executive Board session.

Yesterday, we listened to a broad-ranging presentation on behalf of the EU – observer in the Executive Board. You can endlessly add up the seconds transferred from one state to another, but from this the status of an observer, which an international organization has, cannot turn into the status of a member state.

Today we were even more surprised to see the European Union again on the list of speakers already as an observer with closing, apparently, remarks. Figaro here and there ...

In yesterday's speech, we heard a loose interpretation of UNESCO's "mandate", as well as calls "prendre mesures appropriées" with regard to a particular country. We certainly know that the EU is increasingly resorting to unilateral measures in its policies to impose its point of view. But where are the UNESCO?

Of course, we could not but be surprised that against the background of serious global and regional conflicts, challenges and threats, the destruction of the system of international treaties, a lack of trust, as well as the urgent need to assess the consequences of all these phenomena on the core activities of UNESCO, in a speech on behalf of the EU paid attention to Belarus and the Crimea.

At some point, I even had a simple question: how often do the authors of a speech go out into the street. I highly recommend walking towards the center sometime on Saturday. For those who were not in the center last Saturday and two weeks ago on the Trocadero, a lot of interesting things can open up.

And in terms of discussing violations of the rights of journalists, their protection at the legislative level, and in terms of the use of coercion against those who express an alternative point of view on the street. Wait, take a look. You can even try to prepare a video report... if time will allow you...

As for my country, Belarus is currently going through a difficult political period.

It is important for us to maintain stability within the country and establish a social dialogue. Protect our sovereignty from outside attacks. And who, no matter how Poland, which today stands up for the protection of human rights and journalists in Belarus, should know the sources of this external threat.

Unfortunately, we do not see worthy examples in those countries that are so active with advice and "adopting measures". Their own dysfunction is obvious, and their advice is not credible. And the notorious "measures" threaten to upset the balance in the region.

I assure you that Belarusians have the desire, will and everything necessary for an independent peaceful restoration of stability in society based on the balance of interests of all people.

The last thing we need today is external intervention and teaching.

In terms of freedom of expression and freedom of the media, we reaffirm Belarus' commitment to compliance with relevant international obligations. The right to attend and transmit information from public

events is guaranteed by the Belarusian legislation on mass media and public events.

The Government of Belarus will continue to pay attention to the issues of observance of freedom of expression, freedom of the media and professional rights of journalists, including using the best international experience, while unconditionally observing the national interests of the Republic of Belarus.

UNESCO must focus on addressing critical issues within its immediate area of responsibility. Solidarity, cohesion and support are the pillars of the activities of our Organization.

UNESCO as the lead organization of the United Nations system in the humanitarian sphere, should take on the role of a leader in developing new approaches and recommendations for building multicultural and multi-religious societies based on tolerance.

The initiative of Belarus, supported by UNESCO, to hold an international conference on the study and preservation of the Muslim heritage of Central Europe, is intended to contribute to solving this problem. Unfortunately, the pandemic did not allow this conference to be held as scheduled. But we are convinced that our initiative can make a significant contribution to the work of UNESCO in the thematic area “History, memory and intercultural dialogue for inclusive societies”. Belarus, on whose territory for more than six centuries, representatives of various religions and confessions – Catholics, Orthodox, Muslims and Jews – have lived shoulder to shoulder in peace and harmony, is ready to share its experience in building a conflict-free multicultural society.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize once again that Belarus, as a member of the Executive Board, will continue to make efforts to implement UNESCO's mandate and is ready for a constructive, mutually respectful dialogue with all Member States.

Thank you for your attention.