

41 Session of the UNESCO General Conference

**The speech by
Her Excellency Madam Nina Obuljen Koržinek
Minister of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia**

Paris, 10 November 2021

Dear President of the General Conference,

Your Excellencies,

Dear Director-General,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to have the opportunity to address the General Conference once again in person.

On behalf of the Croatian delegation, I congratulate Mr. Santiago Irazabal Mourao, President of the General Conference on the election, as well as Ms. Audrey Azoulay on her re-election as the Director General of our Organization.

Since our last meeting two years ago, the world has changed significantly.

Global challenges – new conflicts; major climate and demographic changes; migratory flows; political extremism; disregard for international law; great technological advances that have brought with it hybrid threats through the spread of fake news and misinformation – have existed before.

However, the pandemic deepened them even more and further highlighted new divisions, poverty, inequality and exclusion, especially of vulnerable groups.

This taught us a following lesson – when we are vulnerable, it is easier to divide us, and this in turn can lead to new conflicts, violence and extreme forms of behaviour. This is why we need joint cooperation through a strong multilateral framework.

On the eve of its 75th birthday, we need UNESCO as a place of trust, dialogue, solidarity and goodwill that will connect member states through concrete international cooperation in education, science and culture – in order to make change for the better.

I am pleased that the Strategic Transformation Programme has enabled UNESCO to regain its leadership role in times of crisis. It has proven this with a series of initiatives in these past two years, and repeated this quick and effective reaction recently on the example of Haiti and Afghanistan.

Croatia witnessed this role of UNESCO in solidarity after two devastating earthquakes in the capital of Zagreb and the Sisak-Moslavina County that caused great destruction of cultural heritage. For it, we are grateful to UNESCO, as well as other international partners.

Dear colleagues,

I am pleased that during this session we will adopt many important decisions for the functioning of UNESCO in the current and post-COVID period.

The statistics of the consequences of the pandemic are worrying, especially those related to the education of girls and women. Croatia welcomes the numerous initiatives that have enabled the continuation of education, even virtual education.

Education is a fundamental human right and must remain a key engine of sustainable development. In this regard, Croatia remains committed to meeting the Agenda 2030 and SDG4, in particular inclusive and lifelong learning for all, and therefore welcomes the strengthening of the Global Mechanism for Educational Cooperation. Furthermore, the Croatian Government considers curricular reform a top priority that would foster critical

thinking and ensure that our education is aligned with the demands of our societies, economies and environment.

We especially welcome the Futures of Education report, which recognizes that education is humanity's greatest renewable resource that can provide answers to all today's challenges – because it can change the world.

When it comes to higher education, I am pleased to report that Croatia was one of the first states to ratify the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education.

In science, advancements in digital communication, artificial intelligence, and biotechnology have great potential, but they also raise serious ethical questions because innovation and technological change can contribute to unequal development of humanity.

Therefore, we welcome the first global document on ethical principles in artificial intelligence that will enable prevention of many of the risks we face in the digital world.

We also welcome the adoption of the Draft Recommendation on Open Science, because it is scientific cooperation that has shown how to find scientific solutions to global challenges.

With accelerated climate change, the fragility of our planet is becoming increasingly apparent and reflected in the growing threat to biodiversity.

Fifty years ago, the vision of the MAB program began to create a network of biosphere reserves to build societies in harmony with nature. This vision was first followed by Croatia and Hungary, and recently joined by Austria, Slovenia and Serbia, which created the largest protected river area in Europe – the Mura-Drava-Danube reserve. This example shows true meaning of unity and cooperation for preservation of natural heritage.

Dear colleagues,

Thanks to culture, “a man lives a full human life. He needs it for his maturation and freedom, and his future depends on it.” These are the words of Pope John Paul II.

In the age of closures, this influence of culture has come to the fore more than ever. Croatia has strongly supported all UNESCO initiatives, such as ResiliArt, which have sought to reduce the harmful impact of the pandemic on the cultural and creative industries and the diversity of cultural expression, primarily as an active member of the Intergovernmental Committee.

Mondiacult 2022 will be an opportunity to adopt new policies to help artists affected by the crisis.

Through the International Centre for Underwater Archeology in Zadar, UNESCO category II Centre, Croatia strongly supports the implementation of the 2001 Convention. In this context, Croatia and eight Mediterranean countries have decided to work together to preserve the Skerki Banks site in Tunisia, where the first research mission will be sent.

Croatia is a country rich in cultural and natural heritage and considers tangible and intangible heritage equally important, so it advocates not only for the application of a holistic approach, but also for the inclusion of the young and local communities in their preservation. We also believe that multinational nominations exceptionally promote international cultural cooperation.

Croatia supports UNESCO's founding vision, which is today more critical than ever. In the light of this important UNESCO anniversary, I invite you all to join forces for world peace by

strengthening our intellectual and moral solidarity and unity, based on dialogue and mutual understanding.

Thank you.