

Remarks by the Head of the Georgian Delegation

Minister of Foreign Affairs of Georgia

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to the 37th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO

Mr. President of the General Conference,

Madame Director General,

Distinguished Delegates to UNESCO,

First of all let me begin my address by congratulating the new president of the General Conference Mr. Hao Ping upon his election.

On behalf of my country I would also like to congratulate Ms. Irina Bokova on her nomination as a candidate to the position of Director-General and express support for the reforms UNESCO has already carried out under her leadership.

Distinguished Delegates,

We commend the fact that the draft medium term strategy creates good basis for more focused and more performing UNESCO and clearly delineates the ways to strengthen UNESCO's global leading role and effective collaboration within the United Nations system.

We strongly support the overarching objectives of the medium term strategy - contributing to lasting peace and sustainable development.

Georgia focuses on reflecting upon and participating in the Global development agenda and shares the UNESCO priorities with a focus on gender equality and Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I deeply believe that **education** really empowers people, promotes democracy and development. I especially cherish the years when I myself, as a teacher, was a part of a magnificent process of sharing knowledge and values with the young generation.

Georgia fully supports the UNESCO Education programme and especially underlines the need for developing education systems to foster quality lifelong education for all.

Georgia expresses its strong commitment to UNESCO's work on **communication, media, freedom of expression** and safety of journalists.

Significant efforts undertaken by the Georgian Government considerably improved media environment in my country. We will accelerate our efforts to even further improve the situation regarding the freedom of expression and pluralistic media, which were not fully ensured in the past years.

We see **culture** as a driver for growth, stability and sustainable development. Culture must be integrated in development agendas as a driving force for inclusive socio-economic development, peace, security and reconciliation- this was the main point of Director-General's message addressed to EU Eastern Partnership Ministerial Conference on Culture, held in Georgia, in June 2013. This

very idea was also strongly underlined in “Tbilisi Declaration” adopted by the Conference. The Declaration will be presented to the Heads of State and Government at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius and may serve as a road map for better integration of cultural policies in development agendas of Eastern Partnership countries.

We see the UNESCO Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions as an important pillar for development of effective policies in support of culture. Convention is the main framework of cooperation with the EU in the sphere of culture, which is particularly important in the light of perspectives of EU-Georgia Association Agreement.

We fully acknowledge the inappropriate steps of past years that led to the inscription of two Georgian World Heritage Sites to the List of the World Heritage in Danger. New Government is especially committed to meet all the recommendations of the World Heritage Committee. We are currently working on the “World Heritage State Program”. Elaboration of the special World Heritage Legislation is envisaged in the framework of the EU supported TWINNING Project.

Convinced in the need to further strengthen the international efforts for protection of cultural properties not only in the event of the armed conflicts but also in case of occupation, Georgia reconfirms its commitment to the Hague Convention and expresses its determination to contribute to the relevant multilateral cooperation.

Distinguished Delegates,

In 1945, UNESCO was emerged from the ashes of World War II, “to build the defences of peaces in the minds of men and women”.

For more than six decades UNESCO has been robustly advancing the idea of lasting peace. But, unfortunately, in spite of all the efforts of the international community, world still suffers from the armed conflicts, hostilities, military aggression, and occupation, which entail the gravest humanitarian consequences, affecting both people, their cultural expressions and quite often cultural inheritance of the mankind.

In my country, residents of Georgia`s occupied regions continue to be deprived of minimal safeguard for their basic rights and freedoms, including but not limited to the right to education in their native language. Furthermore, even Ossetian and especially Abkhazian languages are seriously endangered on the occupied territories.

The Georgian Government is deprived of possibility to preserve the precious cultural heritage monuments located in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/ South Ossetia, Georgia. This situation underlines the need for launching UNESCO expert mission.

Distinguished Delegates,

Let me express my firm belief that, against all odds, the concept of dialogue and common sense will finally prevail in the minds of men and women throughout the world over the language of hatred, violence and confrontation.

That is what we all should stand for.

That is what UNESCO should still strive for through its enduring intellectual leadership role.