

SPEECH OF H.E. ALTAY CENGİZER, AMBASSADOR AND
PERMANENT DELEGATE OF TURKEY TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD
ON 14 OCTOBER, 2019

Mr Chairman, esteemed colleague,
Madame President of the General Conference,
Madame Director General,
Excellencies,

This delegation adheres to the Statement of the European Union to be made later.

We express our appreciation of the dedicated and wholesome speech of the Director General, finely putting in front of us the challenges we face.

The real force of an institution lies at what is unseen. There is an intangible, yet foundational element which goes beyond the faces we see every day. This is the first breath it was given at the time of its coming to this world. There is, after all, a spirit we must always look around for. Only then we will, still more strongly be reminded that UNESCO has a real potential to become, once again, a game changer. In the past, it achieved this in different fields of competence. UNESCO is an international organisation the great value of which has not been fully recognized for far too long. If we better recognize the new complexities of the world, and keep in mind our many inter-dependencies, we will be able to liberate the promise that UNESCO holds within.

Having just heard my Lebanese colleague, I wish to say that I fully agree with what she said about the importance of recapturing the intellectual depth of UNESCO by hosting philosophers, writers, and those who are at the front of change.

For the first time in the history of mankind, what is biological, physical and digital are about to come together to make part of the same. Technological change brings up to front new, difficult, yet increasingly relevant questions.

Moreover, it is not that the measures we try in order to counter the new unknowns do not bring in their own problems. Artificial Intelligence, Big Data, and so on... UNESCO is competent to deal with and enrich our understanding of all such modern issues.

Conversely, it is difficult to say that this Organisation benefited from politicization. There are all kinds of bi-lateral issues around the world. We cannot expect real benefit from such issues starting to enter the agenda of UNESCO as our organisation is not competent to bring achievable solutions to such problems, because they have so many facets to start with.

If we are to achieve a wider and deeper view of the scenery, we must see that this can only come from enhanced dialogue. Cross-talk cannot be a substitute for a genuine exchange of views. It is much more preferable to seek common sense and good judgment. Let us remind ourselves, therefore, of this huge area wherein lies the power and promise of diplomacy, of mutual respect, and flexibilities that can pave the way for creative thinking. Let us do that before spending the better part of our precious time and energy. This is especially true in the context of multi-lateralism. Naturally, this does not take away from anyone the sovereign right of being critical and trying to bring home their contribution. But, it is a question of measure.

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On the other hand, influence is a legitimate concept in international relations. But it should be applied legitimately. In each different case, we can come across relevant and irrelevant influences. However, one thing is certain: UNESCO cannot be seen as making part of anyone's zone of influence.

Mr Chairman,

It is the responsibility of this Board to duly prepare for the General Conference. The submission of nominations for the office of the President of the 40th Session of the General Conference is one of the items on our agenda on the 22nd of October. However, even now, only eight days before this date, the members of the Executive Board do not officially know whether there are candidates, and if so, who the candidates are.

Why is this the case? The answer is that the issue has been unnecessarily politicized. UNESCO is about the use of soft power. Yet, paradoxically, we are coming across this continued arm-twisting. This issue must right away be drawn back to its proper context and boundaries.

The members of the Executive Board need to know who the candidates are and be informed on the existing procedure of voting at the Board in the case of more than one candidate. Following the established practice and precedents is essential in this respect.

This is the *modus operandi* of UNESCO and it cannot be put under danger. Therefore, we cannot fail to heed by them.

What do we expect from the future President of the General Conference? The Founding Fathers conceived the Presidency of the General Conference as an *ad personam* position, because they did not wish to see the way of any deserving person barred by purely political considerations or because of his or her citizenship, race or colour. The corollary was that they gave a premium to certain, well-known objective criteria. The ability to bridge between different groups, and wisdom accumulated through experience foremost among them.

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Let me say just this:

The voting should take place here at the Executive Board. I declare in front of all the members of the Board that I will accept the result of the voting and will not seek any other venue. We must meet the General Conference at the scheduled day and hour, having duly completed our duties at the Executive Board as everyone expects from us.

Thank you.