

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
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Director-General
of the
United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(Unesco)

on the occasion of his being presented
with the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa
by the University of Belgrade

Belgrade, 13 October 1980

Mr. Rector,
Mr. President of the General Conference,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to receive today the degree of Doctor Honoris Causa, which the University of Belgrade has been kind enough to confer on me, on the proposal of its Faculty of Political Sciences, during the holding of the twenty-first session of the General Conference of Unesco in the capital of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. I should like then to see this distinction as a tribute that is also rendered to the Organization of which I am Director-General, in recognition of its tireless action to strengthen intellectual co-operation throughout the world.

But, first and foremost, allow me to express my deep gratitude to all who are welcoming me to this University: professors, researchers, students, workers of all kinds, and in particular its eminent rector, Mr. Miroslav Pečujlić, the authority of whose work extends beyond the frontiers of Yugoslavia. I should also like to tell Professor Najdan Pašić how touched I am by his very generous remarks concerning me in his introduction.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

How can I fail to feel genuinely proud of belonging henceforward to a university whose history is at one with that of modern Yugoslavia and its battles for freedom and progress?

Throughout their long history, the peoples of Yugoslavia have grappled with every adversity and have been a prey to a whole range of occupying forces. And yet, while their historical continuity may have seemed threatened at one time or another, their determination to be and to remain united has finally emerged victorious.

As a centre of intense intellectual activity, always attuned to the central aspirations of your peoples, your university - our university - has been one of the catalysts in the major struggles of the various nations and nationalities of Yugoslavia to achieve freedom and a stronger spirit of unity.

In this context, it has extended its activities to every realm of the life of the mind, striving to contribute to the assertion of the separate identity of each of your peoples and at the same time to their mutual receptiveness and brotherly co-operation.

It is along these lines that it has developed its teaching and training role, closely bound up with its action to enhance the status of all forms of expression rooted in the cultural personalities of the various nations, and coming to grips directly with the problems of scientific and technical research and with production requirements and the social reality of the world of work.

And it is with this aim in view that it has, in particular, done so much to ensure appreciation of the value of the writings, works of art and monuments, through which the genius of your peoples finds expression and makes itself manifest.

While honouring the many and varied expressions of your national cultures, your university has also endeavoured to spread the ideals of international understanding and co-operation. Since 1956, the Association of Yugoslav Universities, in whose activities the University of Belgrade plays a central part, has organized annual meetings of Yugoslav and foreign teachers and students, together with representatives of international university organizations, known as the "University of Today". These gatherings, at which all aspects of higher education are discussed, provide an opportunity for reflection in which students participate on an equal footing with teachers and research specialists.

I think it highly significant that this twofold awareness - of the specific aspirations of your nationalities and of the aspirations of international co-operation in which you are deeply involved - is to be found in the university of a country which holds fast to its plurinational tradition and to respect for the cultural diversity of its federal components.

One of Yugoslavia's historical merits has been, in fact, its grasp of the fact that its diversity could be one of its sources of wealth, and that, provided the necessary balances were struck between the unity of its peoples and their differences, and between their shared aspirations and their many different forms of expression, that diversity could be a driving force to achieve the advent of a society of freedom, justice and progress.

These were the foundations on which a federalist structure incorporating self-management principles grew up, affording full equality of opportunity and development to all the nations of the Yugoslav family. And your country, in finding new solutions to the problems that it faces, is conducting an experiment whose significance extends well beyond its frontiers, and, especially in the Third World, is suggesting particularly promising theoretical approaches.

Unesco's interest in these approaches is all the greater in that it finds in them the reflection of the endeavour it is itself pursuing, at the international level, to bring about endogenous development based on the cultural identity of each people.

This endeavour may be summed up in terms of the twofold need to give the economy the goals and the cohesiveness that it can derive only from culture, and to restore to culture its crucial function as a socio-economic regulator. In societies composed of many nations, such as Yugoslav society, the question that arises is, therefore, the achievement of development which springs directly from the interaction and reciprocal enrichment of cultures.

This conception of development establishes a harmonious balance between the need for each people to plan its development in accordance with the requirements stemming from its history, its traditions and its own priorities, and the need for all the peoples to co-ordinate their projects in a spirit of brotherly co-operation.

Culture, in such a context, takes on its full social implications. It is the life-blood that feeds creative efforts in all branches of activity, and at the same time enables those efforts to blend harmoniously with one another on the basis of shared values. It underlies not only the forms of expression and networks of communication that are the essential features of a community, but also the forms of organization of labour and the methods of introducing innovations which are best suited to the national temperament.

The extent to which development respects all these obligations is a measure of how far economic growth, directed towards the real needs of a country's people, can live up to their expectations and can come gradually under their management. It is to this extent that the advances of modern science and technology can be properly harnessed and can lead to new syntheses between tradition and progress, between aspirations which have become universal and individual ways of expressing and achieving them. It is, in a word, to this extent that democracy can come into being at the grass roots of society.

Mr. Rector,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The University of Belgrade has at all times made an outstanding contribution to the establishment of such a democracy in your country, a contribution that dates back to the time of the assertion of national unity and patriotic resistance, and one that is becoming more clearly defined at every stage in your development. Thus your institution is at one with the highest aspirations of the peoples of your country. And thus it shares in the effort of the international community to lay the foundations of co-operation based on the equal dignity of all peoples and the authentic development of each of them.

By these remarks, Mr. Rector, I wish to convey how keenly I appreciate the honour of being henceforward a member of your University, and how much I hope that all its undertakings may be crowned with new and resounding success.