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Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

Vision and Action

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Georgia

Note1: To meet UNESCO publishing standards, some editing of papers has been required.

Note2: Authors are responsible for the choice and the presentation of the facts contained in signed articles and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.

Georgia

**Speech of Mr Shota Dogonadze
Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Georgia**

Dear Chairman,
Dear Director-General,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the first place, let me take this opportunity to present to you the warmest regards of the President of Georgia.

It is a great honour for me to represent my country at the World Conference on Higher Education. And it is a particular pleasure that this historic event takes place in UNESCO, which has been contributing to the cause of sustainable development in the new Georgian society for the last six years.

I am sure that the present conference will be a success. The Georgian Delegation, which is represented by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as by the rectors of leading Georgian higher education institutions, will spare no efforts to contribute to this success.

Many of the people who are here know that Georgia had one of the highest levels in higher education in the former Soviet Union. In spite of all the troubles that befell on us in recent years, Georgia has managed to maintain this level. Besides the institutions in the capital, higher education today can be accessed in the different regions of our republic. In the context of a multinational society, we have been doing our best to provide education both in Georgian and in the languages of Georgia's ethnic minorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The political and economic events that took place in Georgia in recent years exerted a decisive influence on one of the most important fields of social life - education. All these changes brought about the urgent need for reforms aiming at the rapid integration of Georgia into the international system of education, experienced by the world community.

At the moment, the large-scale reform of higher education is under way. The new priorities are being determined as well as all the steps in the education process.

Special emphasis is laid on the strengthening of academic mobility, international co-operation, inclusion of the new management models in the financing of education, and utilization of leading information technologies. New forms of interaction between higher, secondary and vocational education are being explored. The optimal model, providing the full employment of graduates, is sought. The accent is put on fostering the management skills of youth and their ability to adapt in the context of a dynamically changing situation.

About 300 Georgian students are sent abroad every year, and approximately the same number of foreign students pursue their higher education in Georgia. The number of these students is increasing with every passing year. This trend is very significant.

Special priority is given to women enrolling in higher education. In the early nineties, women accounted for 45.6% of the total number of students; today they account for almost 50%.

The problem of education for the refugees from Abkhazia, most of whom are starting their lives anew after being displaced from their motherland, remains crucial.

We believe that one of the basic functions of higher education systems in the post-Soviet states in general, and in Georgia in particular, is to promote in young people the development of critical, independent thinking and impartial analysis of a problem. Being one of the major assets of the western education system, it deserves being carefully studied.

Dear participants,

I would like to inform you that many friendly countries, international organizations, regional structures and the private sector are involved in the process of education reform in our country.

I am happy to emphasize the kind support received from UNESCO and its Director-General, a cordial friend of Georgia. We appreciate this very much and assure him of our most sincere gratitude.

Co-operation with UNESCO became an invaluable aid for the Ministry of Education of Georgia, and for many universities and institutes.

A number of important international events have taken place in Georgia under the aegis of UNESCO, the establishment and functioning of the UNESCO Chairs is taking great strides (there are already 3 Chairs, and we hope that their number will increase by the end of 1998); a series of textbooks and scientific papers have been published with the direct financial support of UNESCO; the ASP network is gradually expanding.

In the near future we are planning to join the LINGUAPAX Project. Proceeding from the fact that our country has a multinational population, the implementation of this project in Georgia will undoubtedly promote the intensive learning of both international languages and those of ethnic minorities. We hope that this initiative will enjoy the support of UNESCO.

I would like to give particular attention to the fact that our neighbouring states often join in the implementation of UNESCO projects at subregional and regional levels. This makes a still greater contribution to the dialogue between cultures.

Dear Mr Mayor,

We have carefully studied the texts of basic documents which are to be approved by the participants of the conference. Our delegation supports all the points, which, in our opinion, cover all the criteria for higher education in the 21st century.

Georgia, the country with a rich cultural past, is currently considered as a state with a very promising future, which is largely predetermined by favourable geopolitics. In a number of large-scale projects, Georgia is viewed as a strategic link between Europe and Asia in the context of the ongoing processes of integration. These processes are gaining impetus.

The state is not solely responsible for socio-economic well-being. Expert human resources also contribute to this and here higher education is essential.

Georgia is doing its very best to maintain and improve existing education standards. We are, therefore, asking you to assist us, given that the best investment in the country is the one that results in the development of human resources.

In conclusion, I am happy to thank UNESCO once more and express my support for the strategy of the organization in the field of higher education.

Thank you.