

Paul DOBRESCU*

Introductory Speech

Mrs. Irina Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO was Ambassador of the Republic of Bulgaria to France and Monaco, Personal Representative of the Bulgarian President to the "Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie" and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO from 2005 to 2009.

Born in 1952, Mrs. Bokova obtained an MBA from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations and studied at the universities of Maryland and Harvard in the USA. During her long and distinguished career, she also served as Bulgaria's representative to the United Nations and as her country's Secretary of State for European integration and Foreign Minister. Mrs. Bokova has long promoted the transition to European integration. As Founder and Chairperson of the European Policy Forum, she worked to overcome divisions in Europe and promote the values of dialogue, diversity, human dignity and rights.

On April 27th, 2011 Mrs. Irina Bokova was awarded the title of Doctor Honoris Causa by the National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania. The ceremony took place at the Central University Library of Bucharest. We reproduce in this number of the Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations the Introductory Speech given by Professor Paul Dobrescu, Rector of the National School of Political Studies and Public Administration, the *Laudatio* speech delivered by Professor Remus Pricopie, Dean of the College of Communication and Public Relations, and the acceptance speech *Lectio Prima* given by Mrs. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO.

Distinguished guests,
Dear members of the academic community,
Dear colleagues,
Dear students,

It is a great honour for us to welcome Mrs. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO to this important event in the life of our University. The Senate of the National School of Political Studies and Public Administration decided to confer Mrs. Bokova the most prestigious academic distinction, that of *Doctor Honoris Causa*. Let me present to you the reasons underlying this decision.

Since we find ourselves powerfully involved in education, let me begin by making some statements regarding the role of education in contemporary society. I will do this drawing inspiration from various speeches delivered by Mrs. Irina Bokova and by her priorities as a Director-General of UNESCO.

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As Mrs. Bokova has recently stressed, UNESCO is driven by the conviction that “education is one the most powerful, positive forces for individual, national and international transformation”. A closer look at the contemporary world shows that economic differences between states and regions reflect differences in the achievements of their educational systems. In order to close these economic gaps, the starting point should be the improvements in the education systems. To quote Mrs. Bokova, “at a time of uncertainty, one thing seems certain: education is the best investment for healthier societies and stronger economies”, the safest and most reliable instrument of contemporary development.

I share Mrs. Bokova’s view according to which “fundamentally, education is about values”. Too often, we forget this hard truth. The contemporary society has taught us that a good education is the surest pass to good citizenship. Especially universities are key institutions whose responsibility is to instill to their students and future specialists modern, democratic values, the propensity for diversity, for mutual understanding between cultures and people.

In connection to the role of education, especially in times of economic hardships, please allow me to present a statement that has impressed me a lot. In the context of the global economic crisis, people and nations have been tempted to cut investments in education. In the last State of the Union Address, President Barack Obama fought against this tendency. “Cutting the deficit by cutting our investments in innovation and education is like lightening an overloaded airplane by removing its engine. It may make you feel like you’re flying high at first, but it won’t take long before you feel the impact”. This is a powerful remark, even a warning, and all of us should meditate upon it. I was very glad to find that this powerful view is publicly endorsed by Mrs. Bokova herself. As our distinguished guest has made it clear in a recent editorial, “despite times of austerity and because of them, we must invest in the power of education to transform societies”.

There is a misconception, widely spread especially in Europe, according to which intellectual contributions are limited to books, studies, articles, works of art, etc. It is my belief that institutional building is an equally important intellectual contribution. Institutional building activities set up the infrastructure, the framework for the creative activities as such, open new perspectives for them and connect them to the requirements of each age.

In this context, I would like to reveal Mrs. Bokova’s impressive record of institutional building endeavours in all her official positions and especially as the Director-General of UNESCO.

It is worth mentioning Mrs. Bokova’s efforts to redefine UNESCO’s mission in a globalised world, that of driving the global efforts in the field of culture, science and education. The core of this mission is participation in the global governance by exploiting UNESCO’s vocation, which is truly global. As Mrs. Bokova herself underlines, in order to achieve this, UNESCO must have a forward looking vision and get involved in all the debates concerning the problems of the 21st century. Mrs. Bokova’s term as a Director-General of UNESCO is based on the concept of the new humanism for the 21st century, meaning a new vision on education supporting sustainable development, a new vision on science and technology serving humanity, a new vision on culture stimulating tolerance and mutual understanding.

Let me mention one more thing. Our university has been very selective in awarding this academic distinction. Allow me to name just three personalities who received this special award: Professor Lord Anthony Giddens, the renowned sociologist, Honourable Lord Robertson of Port Ellen, former NATO Secretary General of NATO, and Professor Jan Sadlak, former director of CEPES – UNESCO, Bucharest, Romania. Let me welcome Mrs. Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, to this gallery of eminent personalities.

References

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