

Remus PRICOPIE*

Laudatio

Your Excellences,
Distinguished Guests,
Distinguished Members of the Romanian Parliament,
Dear Mr. President of the Romanian Academy,
Dear Ministers,
Dear Members of the Academic Community,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have, today, the honor to attend a prominent moment in the academic life of the National School of Political Studies and Public Administration – SNSPA, occasioned by the awarding of the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa* to Mrs. Irina BOKOVA, Director-General of UNESCO.

As always, such an event is filled with emotion, and its source lies not only in the fact that an academic community is celebrating an international public figure, but also in the fact that, with the awarding and accepting of the distinction of *Doctor Honoris Causa*, the personality becomes a member of that same academic community. But alongside emotions, there also come some challenges, and the main one is to capture, in only 10-15 minutes, the multiple facets of the personality celebrated here today.

Although this type of challenge is not new for me, it was the first time that I felt the need for a methodological matrix. I felt that such a matrix would help me make sure that I would not overlook any of the main fields of this personality's career accomplishments. Thus, my approach started with a simple question: "What qualities should a person prove in order to be conferred the highest academic distinction?" and the answer, although complex, came out almost by itself:

- a. Have an outstanding academic training;
- b. Have a multiple, complex professional experience;
- c. Be the promoter of innovative ideas and projects, that he or she has implemented successfully;
- d. Be concerned with the capitalization of the experience and knowledge acquired, and with their transfer to the new generations;
- e. Share and promote both the values of the academic community, and the universal values;
- f. Be recognized internationally for his or her achievements;
- g. Be a source of inspiration for those working in his or her field of competence, and also for the younger generations, in general.

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- h. With this matrix of indicators in mind, I began building this *Laudatio*, starting with a look at Mrs. Bokova's outstanding academic training.

A. An outstanding academic training

Those who work in international relations know that there are some educational institutions that, if you are accepted there and manage to complete their programs, are in themselves a guarantee for the solidity of your academic training. Who has not heard of the Moscow or the Washington, D.C. schools of diplomacy? Who has not heard about the prestigious school of diplomacy in the heart of New England, at Harvard University? And Mrs. Irina BOKOVA has enriched her academic training at all these exceptional schools. She graduated:

- in 1976, from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations;
- in 1989, from the University of Maryland, School of Public Affairs,
- and in 1999, from the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University.

Also, her interest in life long learning has proved to be a constant throughout her career, as shown by the completion of many programs, among which, the *NATO fellowship Program for Central and Eastern Europe on democratic institutions*, focusing on the national and legal mechanisms for the protection of minorities.

B. A multiple, complex professional experience

As for the professional experience, Mrs. BOKOVA's career has been both complex, and encompassing multiple fields of interest.

A dedicated diplomat, Mrs. Irina BOKOVA began her career as an Attaché and a Third Secretary at the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in January 1977. After five years of gaining experience at the Ministry, she was assigned the task to join the Permanent Mission of Bulgaria to the UN, in New York. Some might call it fate. I would call it commitment and determination to work in a highly prestigious, and, at the same time, complex international institution. After the mission in New York, Mrs. BOKOVA continued her activity in the areas of interest of the United Nations, and from 1986 until the events of 1990 which led to the democratization of this part of Europe, she held the position of *Advisor to the Minister of Foreign Affairs* in Sofia.

The democratic movements in Bulgaria in 1990, led to an important shift in the carrier of Mrs. Irina BOKOVA. The technocrat diplomat decided to get involved in the political arena. Thus, from June 1990, until October 1991, Mrs. Irina BOKOVA was a Member of the Constituent National Assembly, a political path that, however, was not taking her away from the field of international relations. As a result, Mrs. Irina BOKOVA has been:

- State Secretary on European Integration, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
- Minister of Foreign Affairs;
- Member of the Parliament and Deputy Chair-person of the Foreign Policy, Defense and Security Committee, and the list can go on.

From 2005 to 2009, Mrs. Irina BOKOVA was delegated by the President of Bulgaria with the authority to represent her country as Ambassador to France and Monaco, and to lead the Permanent Delegation of the Republic of Bulgaria to UNESCO.

C. Promoter of innovative ideas and projects

Furthermore, if we take a look at the agenda that Irina BOKOVA promoted throughout her career, we cannot fail to notice that she has proved herself a promoter of innovative ideas and projects, as she has constantly been preoccupied with the cutting edge issues of the day.

Thus, at the beginning of her career she was interested in issues related to:

- political and human rights;
- the agenda of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations;
- equality of women;
- refugees rights;
- economic, social and cultural rights.

After 1990, Irina BOKOVA has started to address new subjects, such as:

- constitutional issues, taking part in the drafting of the new Bulgarian Constitution;
- the complex agenda related to the Council of Europe;
- being in charge of the Bulgarian agenda regarding European accession, a very challenging route that we, Romanians, on our turn, shared with our Bulgarian colleagues;
- issues related to youth, equality, education, development and peace;
- security-related issues.

D. To spread the practice and values of professionalism when approaching the most sensitive issues

Also, among the main interests of Mrs. Irina BOKOVA throughout her activity, a constant one has been spreading the practice and values of professionalism, especially when approaching sensitive issues. And she used various ways for achieving this: from the scientific publications found in the most prestigious libraries of the world, to public conferences held at top world class universities, and from participating in research projects, to an active engagement within professional associations. The list is too long to be reproduced here. However, I would like to dwell for a moment on a single example, from 1997. That year, Mrs. Irina BOKOVA founded and chaired *The European Policy Forum*, a non-profit, non-governmental organization whose main objectives, at that moment, were to promote the European identity and values, to encourage the intercultural dialog and the acceptance and support of diversity, and so on. I have not chosen this example by chance, but to point out that, nearly a decade before the accession of both our countries to the European Union, Mrs. Irina BOKOVA understood the need to promote the European ideas among the citizens of the Eastern-European countries, making use of all means and instruments available, not only through diplomacy, politics or administration, but also using the most effective mechanisms – the grass-root support of the civil society.

E. Dedication to the values of the academic community

In terms of the commitment to the academic values, I strongly believe that someone who searched for the best academic training in top educational institutions around the world, and who, after graduation, even without being a faculty member, kept a constant and close connection with the academic world, cannot but be an individual profoundly confident in the intrinsic values of the university and the academia.

F. International recognition

Of course, recognition is the ultimate validation of achievements, and the wider the circle of people and institutions that one gets recognition from, the more valuable that recognition is. Mrs. Irina BOKOVA has enjoyed international recognition of her work starting early in her career. However, her election as Director-General of UNESCO, in October 2009, is one of the highest forms of international recognition that a professional could ever receive. In October 2009, the 193 Member States of UNESCO voted, with a large majority, for Irina BOKOVA to become the new Director-General of one of the most prestigious organizations worldwide. Moreover, this vote has a significance that goes beyond the person chosen. Member States have endorsed, at the same time, several other elements:

- they voted for Irina BOKOVA, thus validating her professionalism;
- they gave a vote of confidence for an exponent of the gender equality and advancement of women movement, Irina BOKOVA, the tenth Director-General of UNESCO, but the first woman in this prestigious series;
- Member states gave a vote for Bulgaria, but also, implicitly, for the entire Eastern Europe, as a proof of and a support for the sustained efforts this part of Europe has undertaken to ensure its openness towards the world.

G. The power to inspire the new generations

As for the last indicator on the matrix – *the power to inspire the new generations* –, some questions came to mind:

What is the core power of someone who is dedicated to renewal, to bringing about and supporting new ideas, if not that of becoming a mentor, a guide for the new generations?

What is the hard work of a person, if it doesn't inspire others? What is a lifetime endeavor for, if it doesn't leave a legacy behind?

For Irina BOKOVA the answers are easy to find. Her work has been a model for many people of her generation and of the younger generations, both before and after becoming the Director-General of UNESCO. To understand this, all we need is to take a look at her numerous speeches held worldwide, and at the reverberations generated by her messages, be it at the Robert Schuman Institute of European Studies in Florence, Italy, back in the late '90s, or at the College of Europe, Bruges, Belgium, in early 2000s, or her interventions and firm positions taken as head of UNESCO in Haiti, Peru, Morocco, Congo, Argentina, Kenya, Pakistan, to name just a few examples as, naturally, the list is much longer.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you may have already noticed, I have not made many references in my speech, so far, to the current work of Mrs. Irina BOKOVA at UNESCO. Two are the reasons for this. *The first* is that I intended to emphasize in this *Laudatio* the main elements defining the character and the intellectual power of the personality we celebrate today, and these things are not determined by the current position Mrs. Irina BOKOVA holds with UNESCO, but by the very fabric of which this Lady is made of. *The second reason* is that what Mrs. BOKOVA currently undertakes at UNESCO goes far beyond what a *Laudatio* would be able to cover. Still, there are some essential aspects of her present work that need to be mentioned here.

In the address to the 35th General Conference, on October 23rd, 2009, on the occasion of her installation as Director-General of UNESCO, and in different public speeches and sub-

sequent actions, Mrs. Irina BOKOVA expressed her determination to mark a time of renewing and revitalization in the organization's history. Among the objectives announced at the time, and immediately accompanied by concrete actions within the UNESCO Secretariat, one may note:

– *For the Education Sector*: the commitment to develop a methodological framework for the Member States to use in the quality evaluation of their own educational systems. Other new initiatives in the field are concerned with (a) women's literacy and (b) education about climate change and sustainable development;

– *For the Natural Science Sector*:

(a) the establishment of workgroups focused on fighting climate changes,

(b) adaptation of mandates for existing inter-sectoral platforms, and

(c) enforcing the resolution of the General Conference on the elaboration of a *Declaration* on ethical principles related to climate change.

– *For the Social and Human Sciences*: promoting a “new humanism” in which human rights and democracy are the conceptual auspices for addressing issues such as bioethics, migration and urbanization.

– *For the Cultural Sector*: In this field, the Director-General of UNESCO has announced her determination and has made definite efforts to give more visibility to this area, to attract extra-budgetary funds, so that, on one hand, the 890 objectives in the UNESCO World Heritage List would be well preserved and protected and, on the other hand, the list would come to include some other new objectives.

– *For the Communication and Information Sector*: one of the most interesting areas considered is the encouragement and support of linguistic diversity on the Internet; further more, of course, constant interest is given to strengthen the democracies of the world by guaranteeing fundamental human rights, including the freedom of expression, the access to information and the right to participate at the life of societies. Last but not least, the new Director-General of UNESCO is determined to be extremely proactive in the communication associated with the projects implemented by UNESCO.

As well, in all her interventions and actions, she has committed herself and UNESCO, with an impressive energy, in the assertion of culture and science as factors of development in the context of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, at a time when trade and finances seem like the only engines of economic development. Such a statement of interest is strongly reassuring and encouraging, especially for countries like Romania and Bulgaria, trying to use at best their comparative advantages in a highly competitive world.

In fact, capturing into a single statement the work of Mrs. Irina BOKOVA as Director-General of UNESCO, during the first half of her mandate, we can say, without reserve, that she has had the courage to reopen the discussion on our current challenges, and to encourage the intellectual elites of the world to get actively involved in shaping the future of our societies. That is exactly what the founders of UNESCO considered to be the main role of this organization in the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Please, allow me a confession. During the process of reviewing Mrs. BOKOVA's career and work, in writing this *Laudatio*, I was diligently looking for the best formula to describe in a synthetic manner the personality that we are celebrating here, today. And I was happy to find it in the statements delivered by her. Of course, beyond any doubt, Irina BOKOVA is a

diplomat, a professional, and an international leader. But, in my opinion, Irina BOKOVA is, above all, a *believer*, someone who strongly believes in the power of humanity and the strength of nations, someone who knows that the real power resides in dialogue, not in confrontation, and that the ability to listen to and respect the person next to you is the source of fruitful intercultural dialogue. These are the values that Irina BOKOVA has advocated all along her life and career, from her days as Attaché and Third Secretary at the Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, back in 1977, until today, when she is the Director-General of UNESCO.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My endeavor here is the expression of the will of the Senate of the SNSPA to recognize exceptional work and professionalism. By awarding the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa* to Mrs. Irina BOKOVA, the Senate of the SNSPA not only recognizes her remarkable achievements so far, but also builds new bridges between the academic community of the SNSPA, and why not of the other Romanian universities, and our distinguished guest, Mrs. Irina BOKOVA, who, in fact, today, is becoming member of the Romanian academic community. Thank you very much for your attention!