

**Informal on-line conference of Ministers of Education of the State parties to the European Cultural Convention under the Greek Presidency of the Committee of Ministers
29 October 2020**

**Emmanuella Doussis
Associate Professor, UNESCO Chairholder on Climate Diplomacy
National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece**

Your excellencies,

It is a great pleasure and indeed an honor to address you and transmit the message of the young generation on the role of education in protecting cultural heritage from climate change. Their voice has been heard during a virtual simulation organized by the Ministry of Education and Religious Affairs of the Hellenic Republic and the UNESCO chair on climate diplomacy hosted by the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, in October 22 and 23.

For two days, a diverse group of 50 students, originating from different fields of studies and disciplines, as well as different CoE member-states, assumed the role of Ministers of Education of the Council of Europe member-states and those with observer status. The students deliberated on the expected policy responses concerning the development of a comprehensive educational policy approach to the cultural heritage and climate change nexus.

The preparation of the event started months ago. A call was launched through social media and the UNESCO chairs network; more than 100 students from different countries stepped up; the selection committee chose 50 and assigned their roles on the basis of three criteria:

- geographical representation;
- previous experience in simulations of international institutions;
- and, of course, motivation.

Then, we offered an intensive e-programme on the profile of the Council of Europe and its working methods, the core issues of the agenda as well as the official rules of the event, including an e-mock session of the meeting.

During the event, the students discussed how education can help to promote awareness of cultural heritage at risk from climate change. The debates focused on four main issues:

- the evolution of educational curricula;
- the challenges education should meet in terms of democratic culture and human rights;
- the role of digital technologies in this context, and
- the development of synergies between the CoE and the EU.

The final outcome of these debates has been summarized in a declaration and a detailed action plan, both adopted unanimously. The declaration firstly recognizes the crucial role of education in protecting cultural heritage from climate change. It then calls for the introduction of comprehensive interdisciplinary curricula in all levels of education, aiming to expand knowledge and raise awareness on this issue.

The declaration further proposes the development of a Pan-European schools network through which schools around member states could communicate and exchange best practices as well as co-organize events that promote participatory governance and respect of human rights under the light of climate change impacts on cultural heritage.

Another suggestion worth mentioning is to make the best use of the latest emerging technologies for the protection of cultural heritage and management of climate change impacts.

Last but not least, the declaration calls for the development of synergies between the Council of Europe and the European Union for the establishment of a joint action focusing on assessing and recording real-time cultural heritage vulnerability to climate change, so as to be used in education and decision-making.

It is worth noticing that the students had a lengthy discussion on the issue of adopting a concrete legal framework on protection of cultural rights under the light of new challenges, including climate change and the role of education towards this aim. They suggested that this could be achieved either by the adoption of an *ad hoc* instrument on this issue or (why not?) by the adoption of a new protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights.

Your excellencies,

This simulation was a good practice not only for understanding how the Council of Europe actually works, but also for providing a useful exercise for the development of realistic and co-operative proposals for the protection of cultural heritage from climate change from the ground up. Thank you very much for your attention.