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ETUCE Remarks
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Good morning colleagues, friends. Please allow me to once again thank the minister and our Serbian hosts for a very warm welcome to Belgrade. Although this is my first foray into the city, I can think of no other place as fitting for this event, especially during these peculiar times in which we are living. Belgrade has seen and experienced it all since settlers first arrived some 7,000 years ago. It has flourished and survived through the Roman, Byzantine, Ottoman, Serbian and Austrian empires. This is a city that has endured centuries of change, of moments of hardship. Its people understand difficult challenges at the most personal level.

So as we gather here this week I think it is fitting that we look to our hosts for strength as we face a world which continues to lurch away from our core democratic values and toward unknown territory.

Our last World Congress identified four global developments, worrisome if not dangerous developments that need to be confronted:

One: The further integration of the world economy which is moving the balance of power from democratic institutions to unelected corporations and other market forces.

Two: The declining respect for international standards affecting our democratic freedoms and civic rights.

Three: Geo-political shifts affecting national sovereignty and long-standing global standards for peace.

And four: the surge of extremism by groups claiming to act in the name of religion or for ethnic or nationalistic reasons. All these developments are posing political as well as educational and professional challenges, that will place additional strain and demands on our members, on our unions, on our profession, and on Education International itself.

And perhaps there is a fifth development, which relates to the Brexit and the election of Mr. Trump to President of the United States, both which may pose additional and yet to be realised challenges.

As education unions, I believe that we have both the power and responsibility, and that is key, to weather this storm and defend and promote the values that help bring us together.

In September we delivered this message in New York when we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Recommendation on the status of the teaching profession. Although a document written in a bygone era, the Recommendation is far more than the text printed on the page. Greater than the sum of its parts. It first of all affirms the transformational role that teachers play in the lives of children, their families and in their communities. It speaks of, and I quote, “the essential role of teachers in educational advancement and the importance of their contribution to the development of man and modern society.” Not bad for 1966, but we cannot take this foundational document for granted.

Colleagues, being a teacher is about moral purpose; about a commitment to making a positive difference in young people’s lives. And that commitment is on full display every day around the world, despite our shifting politics.

It’s about helping ensure that young people are able to support themselves, to contribute to society as a whole, whether as employees, entrepreneurs, professionals, artists, and yes, even politicians. The

transfer of basic and advanced knowledge and skills is at the core of our mission. And yet there is another, perhaps even more essential task: Imparting shared values, human rights values, democratic values.

Just last month we were in Stockholm for EI's Refugee Education Conference where we spent two intense days looking at the challenges facing the thousands of young people who have sought safety here in Europe. Participants rolled up their sleeves and worked to develop concrete actions to see that all refugee children and youth have the chance of a quality education.

We made it clear that refugee programmes are to be designed in consultation with teachers and their organisations. We do not want a top down approach. Our classroom teachers should be involved with the development of programmes from their very inception. And teachers' initial training should include a focus on cultural and religious diversity in order to create a world where our differences define what binds us.

However, we went further than that. As we all know, what happens in the classroom is about far more than the transfer of basic skills. It is about integration, it is about diversity, it is about educating European citizens, it is about educating global citizens. To quote one of the moderators at the Stockholm conference, Professor Fernando Reimers of Harvard University: "The way things will go in the world rests on what teachers do." We live in a globalised world, the only world our children know. We must give more prominence to Global Citizenship Education. This was one of the conclusions that we reached in Stockholm, and one of the pledges that EI has made.

We committed to continuing to advocate with our global partners, and encourage you, our member organisations, to lead the way and share the lessons you learn with your individual members.

But it is not just a matter of understanding each other. Beyond migration our world is being defined by modern factors that are causing major shifts in how we live, work and adjust as a profession.

International trade pacts are redrawing and erasing borders. ICT, in society at large and in the classroom, is forcing us to both protect our professional autonomy and to rethink the way we educate. Both of these factors, trade and technology, are seeing us confront a wave of privatisation that threatens our very roles as educators and the quality of and access to education our pupils deserve.

Let me once again stress that education is not a commodity. We cannot accept our school systems or part of them to be run by anyone other than our public authorities. The public school is one of the pillars of our democratic systems, it is our main tool to achieve social cohesion and equity, something that all of our societies are yearning for.

These topics and issues – migration, trade, ICT and privatisation – are at the forefront of your agenda this week. And though on the surface they may appear individually unique, they are in fact all part of our interconnected world. I know that together we can address both the future of our profession and the future of our societies.

Education is not the only solution to our European and global challenges, but there is no solution without education. It is about creating peace and tolerance. It is about building acceptance. It is about critical thinking and free discussion, both of which are being threatened in too many places. And colleagues, it is a powerful deterrent in the face of intolerance and ignorance.

Friends, I wish you a successful conference. One that helps pave the way toward answers for many of these obstacles and opportunities. Thank you.