



In a statement for Tanjug news agency, Serbian Ambassador to UNESCO Tamara Rastovac Siamashvili said that Pristina is aware that it has no support to apply for UNESCO, primarily because of how well-regarded Serbia is in this organization, but also owing to the active engagement of Belgrade in the organization's bodies.

The Ambassador said that the fact that Zlakusa pottery making was inscribed on the UNESCO list of intangible cultural heritage is very important in the context of Serbia's visibility and international promotion of our cultural heritage, stressing that the nomination for the inscription was prepared applying a high level of expertise.

Speaking for Tanjug she said that there is always a threat that Pristina might apply for membership, but that there is a lot going to their disadvantage in this context.

In the first place, she stressed, Serbia was re-elected last year to the UNESCO Executive Board (EB) which discusses all issues before being submitted to the General Assembly of the organization. Furthermore, Serbia is also on the Bureau of the Executive Board, an even more specific body which discusses all issues before the EB does.

"Taking into account that we are a member of both the Executive Board and the Bureau, such

application would be first considered in these bodies where Serbia has played a highly active role", Ambassador Rastovac Siamashvili said.

She said that Serbia enjoys a high level of appreciation in this organization which was best demonstrated by the fact that UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay paid a visit to Serbia last year.

"On that occasion, Ms. Azoulay met with President Aleksandar Vucic, the Prime Minister, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Education, and the visit was very successful. After that, President Vucic in November 2019 participated in the 40th session of the UNESCO General Assembly and met with madam Director-General again. Activities are underway at multiple levels to strengthen the position of Serbia", Ambassador Rastovac Siamashvili explained.

The Ambassador said that this was also demonstrated in the letter from UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Nikola Selakovic in which she clearly pointed out that Serbia is perceived as an active UNESCO member state promoting international cooperation and that, as a member of the Executive Board, it plays a leading role in shaping the contribution of the organization to the efforts made by governments across the globe in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

"All of this goes in our favour and supports our efforts aimed at preventing any unilateral moves by Pristina, which would be unacceptable, seeking to be admitted to UNESCO membership. On the other hand, it is extremely important to us that Director-General Azoulay holds a firm position and makes efforts to depoliticize the organization. This is also highly valued by our country", the Ambassador said.

This relationship is highly important to Serbia, she said, particularly in the context our fight for the preservation and restoration of the Serbian cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija.

The Ambassador said that Serbia submits annual reports to the World Heritage Centre on the situation regarding the conservation of these goods while pointing out the threat they are facing.

"We welcome the activity of UNESCO on the protection of our cultural heritage in Kosovo and Metohija, but it is absolutely unacceptable to us for an application of the so-called "Kosovo" to be even considered, and I believe that our position is very good as our active engagement has been recognized. One such application would be a threat not only to Serbia but the organization itself, as it would clearly lead to its politicization", the Ambassador said.

She also underlines as important that Serbia is using its engagement within UNESCO to also promote its bilateral relations with its member states, with the issue of Kosovo and Metohija as a priority in our communication.

In addition to the protection of cultural goods in Kosovo and Metohija, Serbia has also been active in other areas such as education, the Ambassador said emphasizing that our country is part of a group promoting multilateralism and added that it was met with great appreciation that Serbia earmarked a EUR 30,000 donation to the Global Media Defence Fund administered by

UNESCO.

"Our intensified activity in all areas has shown Serbia in its true light, and this is an integral part of our foreign policy engagement. This is certainly helpful in the context of our fight for the defence of our territorial integrity and sovereignty", Ambassador Rastovac Siamashvili said.

She underlined that the inscription of Zlakusa pottery making on UNESCO's representative list of intangible goods is a great success, adding that the nomination for this was meticulously prepared.

"The evaluation body comprising experts for intangible heritage gave its approval first, which made it significantly easier for the committee to give its approval as well. There were no amendments or remarks whatsoever and the nomination was successfully evaluated", she said.

The Ambassador noted that this was very important for Serbia's visibility and the promotion of our cultural heritage at the international level.

"This is the fourth item to be included on this representative list, which is truly a great success. In addition to strengthening the promotion of Serbia and its wealth, it also showed that if something is truly prepared in a proper way, as was the case with this and all other nominations, the success is guaranteed", she said.

The Ambassador added that this was also a result of the work done at the expert level, taking into account that the nomination was prepared extremely well.

"This came as a result of the joint efforts by the Ethnographic Museum, Ministry of Culture and the Serbian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO. I hope that we will be able to share such good news with you in the future as well", she said.

The Ambassador explained that the selection process is long and demanding as the expert body may return the nomination to be reworked, if they find that additional documents need to be submitted, which may last a year or two.

Ambassador Rastovac Siamashvili added that plans are underway to nominate more cultural goods, but she would not reveal the details just yet.

"There is a series of goods that we plan to have inscribed not only on the representative list of intangible heritage. World Heritage List is also important and it already includes Serbian goods, but we have a roster of planned goods that are going to be submitted for approval once we prepare the necessary documents", Ambassador Rastovac Siamashvili concluded.