

***The first Romanian to head a UNESCO
governing body in 68 years of belonging to this
organization***

H.E. Simona-Mirela Miculescu



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In the field of Romanian diplomacy, you are a pioneer in many regards: the first female spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the first woman with the diplomatic rank of Ambassador, the first woman to lead the Permanent Mission of Romania to the United Nations, and the first woman to lead the Permanent Delegation of Romania to UNESCO. **Can you share with us some of the iconic moments in which you contributed to consolidating Romania's image at the international level?**

The entire work of the diplomats is devoted to promoting and consolidating the image of their country at the international level! So, during more than 33 years of diplomatic career, I count many endeavors and successes.

But, if I had to choose one impactful achievement, that would be the creation – in 1995, while serving as the first press secretary ever of the Romanian Embassy in the US – of **the first official Romanian site on the Internet!** It was revolutionary at that time, and I owe it to a visionary ambassador – Mihai Botez – who supported it wholeheartedly! It opened an unprecedented window of opportunity for disseminating information about our country, and for communicating with the Romanian communities from abroad...

Then I would mention a special project that I had the opportunity to generate - that of the donation, by Romania, to UNESCO, of a stunning work of art created by the reputed Romanian artist Mircea Cantor. It is the "Angels and Planes" tapestry, donated in the context of **the celebration of 65 years since Romania's accession to UNESCO.** This wonderful tapestry - that is placed between two works signed by Alberto Giacometti and Pablo Picasso - is the first ever Romanian work of art permanently exposed to the public in the UNESCO headquarters. This is a real victory for the visibility of Romania in this unique temple dedicated to culture, art, education, science and communication!

I also think that **my election as President of the UNESCO General Conference in November 2023 for a two-year term** is an excellent tool for promoting Romania's image. For me, this election represents a unique personal and professional success, crowning a long diplomatic career, because **I was elected in this position, unanimously, in a not very easy geopolitical context, by the representatives of the other 193 member states of UNESCO.** The election by acclamation, to the applause of a full house, represented an exceptional moment of emotion and pride, as well as an expression of the confidence that the Member States had in my professional capacity and expertise necessary to lead the General Conference - the supreme decision forum of UNESCO.

All the more so, since I am **the first Romanian to head a UNESCO governing body in 68 years of belonging to this organization,** and only the fifth woman president of the General Conference in its history of 79 years. A historic moment for me and Romania, that is an unprecedented opportunity for reinforcing the profile of my country in this prestigious global arena.

According to UNESCO's Global Priority Gender Equality Framework, education is viewed as a priority area for advancing gender equality, another area being the empowerment of women in science and technology in order to combat climate change. **Which are the latest developments regarding the implementation of these objectives at the UNESCO level?**

Indeed, Gender equality is a global priority at UNESCO. Globally, **122 million girls and 128 million boys are out of school.** Women still account for almost two-thirds of all adults unable to read.

UNESCO calls for attention to gender equality throughout the education system in terms of access to information, teaching and learning contexts and practices, learning outcomes, and life and work opportunities. **The UNESCO Strategy for gender equality in and through education (2019-2025)** focuses on a system-wide transformation to benefit all learners equally in three key areas: better data to inform action, better legal and policy frameworks to advance rights and better teaching and learning practices to empower.

There are numerous tools, including normative frameworks, technical guidelines, statistical databases that UNESCO puts at the disposal of decision-makers, teachers and all stakeholders to achieve a transformative education and advance gender equality worldwide. **Through its over 50 offices around the world, UNESCO is also implementing an important number of projects** and programmes benefiting women and girls education.

Among the key normative tools developed by UNESCO, as an example, I would mention the UNESCO Recommendation on Education for Peace, Human Rights and Sustainable Development, which was adopted by the 194 member states of UNESCO in November last year, under my Presidency. This is an extremely important global normative framework, in particular in the current international context. **It is the only global standard-setting instrument that lays out how education should be used to bring about lasting peace and foster human development through 14 guiding principles.**

Which are some of the most significant challenges UNESCO faces today in its mission to defend peace and enable the prosperity of humanity through international cooperation, and how can they be tackled?

One of main challenges is that **UNESCO is entrusted by its Member States with an increasing number of topics and responsibilities** in tackling global challenges, ranging from the ethics of the artificial intelligence and neurosciences, to quality education for all, and the protection of the world's tangible and intangible heritage, to mention but a few.

Although the volume of its budget has increased in the last years due to important partnerships, **the Organization has to find the right balance between prioritizing its actions while also responding to the Member States' multiple needs and requests**, which is not an easy endeavor.

It is now up to decision-makers at national level to leverage on this incredibly useful, globally agreed instruments, and to transform the education paradigms at local and national levels, thus ensuring, in the long term, lasting peace, gender equality, respect of human rights and sustainable development.

Have you met someone who represented a role model for you, and who inspired you?

I know that, when asked this question, everybody expects me to name Madeleine Albright or Hillary Clinton – amazing ladies whom I met and who totally inspired me! But **my absolute role models remain my grandmother who was “crowned” as the kindest woman in her village, and my mother, who is a solar human being, constantly spreading inner light, peace and positive vibes.**

Finally, we would kindly ask you to address a few words to the young people dreaming of a career in diplomacy. Which are the main qualities a career diplomat should have, and what is your advice for the young people who want to embrace a diplomatic career?

I cannot but encourage all young people who wish to embrace a career in diplomacy to not be shy and follow their dream. Actually, with the current challenges the world faces, **we need more than ever to keep youth connected and involved in all areas of our society, diplomacy included.**

I should say that this profession is very complex, far beyond the known stereotypes. For those who practice it, they need to be endowed with high qualities and skills, both professional and personal.

You must always be open in dialogue with your interlocutors and have the ability to easily adapt to the realities, culture and customs of the space in which you carry out your mission. At the same time, **diplomacy requires discretion, self-control in any situation**, no matter how difficult, tact, negotiation skills, discernment, perfect knowledge of protocol codes and usages and, last but not least, knowledge of as many foreign languages as possible.

A rich general culture and in-depth knowledge in the field of international relations are also indispensable qualities in the profile of a diplomat, doubled by **synthesis and analysis capacity**, written and verbal communication skills, sociability and creativity.

As a representative and supporter of your country's interests in a foreign state or international organization, you must naturally have a very pronounced sense of duty and loyalty. And I wish to quote a renowned Romanian diplomat, Valentin Lipatti, whose birth centenary was celebrated in 2023. He gave a very nice definition of what loyalty means: *“We must remain, without excesses and without servitude, faithful to the love of our country and our national values, convinced that this is the only way that can give our words and deeds credibility and strength. Patriotism is neither an eccentricity, a thing of shame, nor a dangerous anachronism. To deprive ourselves of it would simply be self-harming and would stop us from feeling we are worth much. That is, it would stop us from being ourselves in a society like ours that needs whole and authentic people more than ever”.*

H.E. Simona-Mirela Miculescu

Amb. Simona-Mirela Miculescu has been holding her current position since 2021. During her 33 years of diplomatic career, she served as Spokesperson for the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Senior Media Advisor to the Minister, Director of the Press Department, Press Secretary of the Romanian Embassy in Washington D.C., Senior Public Information Officer at the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, Foreign Policy Advisor to the President of Romania, Senior Advisor for Public Outreach to the Government of Iraq, Ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary and Permanent Representative of Romania to the UN, as well as Representative of the UN Secretary General and Director of the UN Office in Belgrade.

She is the first woman in Romania to be granted the diplomatic rank of ambassador.

Amb. Miculescu is currently serving also as the President of the 42nd Session of the UNESCO General Conference (2023-2025), first Romanian ever to lead a governing body of this organization.