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**EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION  
– Florence Convention –**

***FIRST CONFERENCE OF THE CONTRACTING AND  
SIGNATORY STATES TO THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION***

*Council of Europe, Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg  
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Room 10*

**Adoption of the European Landscape Convention**

*by*

*Ms. Roberta ALBEROTANZA*

*Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs  
General Directorate for Promotion and Cultural Co-operation*

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**Ms Roberta ALBEROTANZA,**  
**Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

Mr Chairman, Mr Deputy Secretary General, Directors, ladies and gentlemen,

I would firstly express my very sincere thanks to the Council of Europe authorities for organising this major conference and inviting me to take part.

Three different kinds of sentiment inspire what I have to say this morning.

These sentiments reflect the Italian Government's commitment to the adoption and opening for signature of the European Landscape Convention, now also known as the Florence Convention.

Aware that this achievement is the outcome of a common endeavour, we hope to be able to share these sentiments with you so that European co-operation in this field may gain still more strength in the future.

Firstly, we are actuated by a sense of gratitude towards fellow-officials in the various ministries and embassies who, each in his own remit, have done their utmost to secure firstly the adoption of the Convention by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe during the Italian Chairmanship on 19 July 2000 in Strasbourg, then its opening for signature by Member States on 20 October of the same year in Florence.

As you know, this commitment had a sound basis in the work of the Cultural Heritage Committee and the Committee on Biological and Landscape Diversity. Under their well-balanced guidance, from September 1999 to February 2000 a drafting committee validated the draft convention prepared between 1994 and 1998 by the Council of Europe's Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe.

Thanks to the constructive spirit of these committees of experts, it was possible to abide by the essential features of the initial draft, which had moreover received initial approval at an informal intergovernmental consultation meeting held in Florence in April 1998.

Our sense of gratitude also extends to the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly which, day by day, never withheld the political support needed to carry through the intergovernmental negotiation.

The Council of Europe Secretariat and its network of experts was able to ensure the requisite independence, transparency and expertise all along the way, and did so in the name of the principles now embodied in the Convention. Thanks are also due to it for this.

The second feeling that moves us is one of satisfaction.

Satisfaction is felt at the realisation that, if you will pardon the expression, a dream has finally come true. Indeed, one of the main aims of this Organisation is to make legal principles of the ideals underpinning and nurturing European civilisation.

True, it is not always an easy matter to transform ideas into legal principles, especially considering that an ideal is precisely what exists only in the imagination.

Aware of its role and experience, and secure in its close contact with the citizens, the Council of Europe is constantly at pains to identify the ideals that further the consolidation of the European cultural identity, most of all after the momentous political, social and economic changes which have marked the history of our continent over the last ten years.

In the course of this on-going reflection, the ideal of landscape has been recognised as an essential factor in the quality of our environment and a fundamental component of our multiple identities.

On that basis, the ideal has been translated into legal principles common to all European States, in the framework of a text widely acclaimed for its innovative character which is also due to the democratic methods which attended its preparation. We are convinced that this is an outstanding political achievement on which we may well congratulate ourselves.

This mood of satisfaction is heightened when we realise the complexity of the Convention's subject-matter and the breadth of its scope.

Indeed, during the early years of preparatory work, some opposition was aroused by the conceptual difficulties surrounding landscape and the practical implications associated with the holistic nature of the draft convention's field of application.

This opposition was expressed by certain bodies specialising in nature protection or heritage conservation, which wanted to keep landscape in the closed circuit of their own capacities.

In order to counter these tendencies, while invoking nature and cultural heritage considerations the initial draft of the convention relied on arguments of a social kind, and these are perhaps responsible for its overcoming the conceptual difficulties which arose, on the one hand, from its polysemous and multidisciplinary nature and, on the other hand, from the duality of its subjective and objective dimensions.

Thanks to the persistence of the drafters, who were able to uphold this working basis over the years, it is now possible for the Convention to be founded on a highly innovative conception of landscape, one which is capable of altering the approach to official policies on environment, cultural heritage and spatial planning at the national and European levels.

The Convention in fact stipulates that landscape must receive recognition and legal protection irrespective of the value or quality which it expresses. Hence, not only areas expressing singular landscape value or quality must come under landscape protection; such protection must also be extended to the entire territory of States, especially in relation to ordinary and damaged landscapes.

The Council of Europe has thus succeeded in democratising landscape by providing governments with a key to open up a new field of public action bearing on the inhabitants' quality of life and applying to the entire territory of our States.

The setting in which people live is indeed not always one that embodies exceptional landscape values, yet all citizens are entitled to a good-quality landscape and not only those privileged to inhabit or have contact with landscapes of exceptional value.

The third feeling that inspires us, Mr Chairman, is hope. The political importance of the European Landscape Convention was not lost on our governments who, through their representatives, have decided to sign it. However, as we are well aware, signature basically constitutes no more than a promise.

To make sure that the promise is kept and that the Convention does not remain ineffectual, the bodies responsible for incorporating international treaties into the domestic legal systems of States should now finish the work begun with intergovernmental co-operation.

The response made by the Council of Europe must also be equal to the political success of the treaty which it has brought into being. Its response must therefore take into account the expectations of governments which, by virtue of the Convention, have confirmed de jure and de facto the Council's exclusive role regarding landscape protection in Europe.

From this standpoint, it is desirable that the activities for promoting and monitoring the Convention performed under the supervision of the Council of Europe Secretariat should continue to meet the expectations of States regarding the inspirations, the character and the aims of this new European treaty.

Our authorities are gratified on that score because, relying on acknowledged legal and technical skills, the structures of the relevant directorate were recently adapted in order to secure:

- the cross-cutting, comprehensive and multidisciplinary character of the Convention's field of application;
- the necessary co-ordination in view of the diversity of the scientific disciplines involved;
- the flexibility required by the relevant sectoral policies of States.

We feel that these constitute the guidelines for future work, Mr Chairman.

We are convinced that compliance with these principles will make it possible for the landscape ideal which underpins the Florence Convention to continue radiating its spiritual power as an irreplaceable resource and guide for the success of our joint activities.