



Strasbourg, 20 November 2001

T-FLOR 1 (2001) 4

**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
22-23 November 2001
Room 10*

**Commitment of the Parliamentary Assembly
in favour of the European Landscape Convention**

by

Mr. IONESCU

*Member of the Commission for Environment and Agriculture
of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe*

*Document by the Secretariat General
prepared by the Regional Planning and Technical Co-operation and Assistance Division*

Mr Deputy Secretary General,
Honoured government delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

As a member of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, I am pleased to have this opportunity to greet on behalf of the Assembly the participants in this first Conference of Signatory States to the European Landscape Convention.

I also wish to convey the apologies of Ms Giovanna MELANDRI, former Italian Minister for Culture and now a member of the Italian delegation to the Assembly, who was to have represented the Parliamentary Assembly at this Conference. Many of you, how devotedly, Ms MELANDRI and the Italian Government have backed the Convention. It is a great pity that she has had to cancel her participation in this Conference owing to her parliamentary commitments.

In today's constantly and radically changing society we all need certain landmarks or enduring points of reference on which we can retire and replenish our spiritual resources depleted by day-to-day stress.

Among these landmarks, which constitute our shared heritage, landscape has an altogether distinctive role. Indeed, landscape, whether natural or fashioned by man, whether farmland, forest, mountain scenery or townscape, is an essential part of our human environment.

It is so closely associated with the image which we have of our daily surroundings that we often forget to pay attention to the beauty of the landscapes around us. We also forget that they are unfortunately very vulnerable and extremely difficult to restore.

Human activities aimed at turning natural resources and the cultural heritage to account are in fact bringing ever stronger pressures to bear on the environment, European landscapes included. The pressure of the consumer and business society tends to sacrifice environment and landscapes too readily for the sake of a certain profit! This is liable to cause – and does cause – deterioration and disfigurement of what constitutes our shared wealth.

This being the position, it has become urgent to reconcile the often contradictory needs of our evolving society. The protection of landscapes should therefore be placed in the context of the overall sustainable development policy whose aim is to secure to future generations the necessary conditions and resources for the progress of mankind.

That is why, from the outset, the Parliamentary Assembly attached very special importance and gave its political backing to the initiative of the Standing Conference, later the Congress, of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe to draw up a legal instrument for safeguarding landscapes.

Since 1994 the Assembly has taken an active part alongside the Congress in the work of preparing the Convention. It adopted a number of texts in support, and was actively involved in its promotion, particularly during the Campaign "Europe, a common heritage" launched in September 1999 in Bucharest.

We therefore have every reason to be both happy and proud that our efforts, combined with the efforts of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and the efforts of many Governments, culminated in the signing of the European Landscape Convention a year ago in Florence.

However, the signing of the Convention is only a step, doubtless important but by no means sufficient, along the way to preservation of our common landscape heritage. At this stage it is important that the Convention should come into force and be implemented.

We must therefore persevere in endeavours at all levels – parliamentary, governmental, regional and local – to make the good intentions stated in the Convention materialise in tangible undertakings by States to preserve European landscapes.

The effort to raise awareness among Europe's citizens should also continue, so that they realise our common responsibility towards future generations.

The preamble to the draft European Landscape Convention reads: "the landscape is a key element of individual and social well-being; its protection, management and planning entail rights and responsibilities for everyone".

This sentence encapsulates an entire programme of action for every citizen of Europe.

In this connection I should like to recall the words of the great French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry when he said, concerning the heritage, that we do not inherit it from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.