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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*

Welcoming speech

by

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should like to begin by expressing my satisfaction that so many representatives of governments and of governmental and non-governmental international organisations have seen fit to attend this First Conference of the Contracting and Signatory States to the European Landscape Convention.

I intend to make three observations.

The first is to stress that the field of landscape heritage is one in which the themes of natural and cultural heritage are intimately linked and act upon one another.

Europe comprises an infinite variety of landscapes which have formed the identity of regions and of their inhabitants, bearing testimony to their culture, history and skills. The beauty and uniqueness of landscapes provide meaning for us all and afford us pleasure and pride. As the main reference points for the people who live among them, they shape their emotional and aesthetic sensibilities. They express cultural diversity and are a dimension of the cultural heritage which must be protected against the trend towards standardisation and uniformity.

Europe is also rich in an extraordinary biodiversity which mirrors its wide range of geographical features. The soil is a complex and fragile living environment which needs to be nurtured. The decline in biodiversity indicates that limits must be set on human intervention.

My second observation is to point out that the European Landscape Convention, like the UNESCO Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, provides a context within which nature and culture can be combined and allowed to interact. The Council of Europe has other specialised conventions relating to natural habitats (the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats) and to property and monuments (the Granada Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe and the Valletta Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage). The European Landscape Convention simultaneously addresses the themes covered by all these instruments; in so doing it becomes a reference framework. It also makes extensive reference to social and economic considerations: the social demands on quality landscapes are very great, and the economic implications of the condition of landscapes, especially in terms of tourism, are self-evident.

Thirdly, I should like to point out that the cross-sectoral nature of the theme of landscapes is also reflected in the organs of the Council of Europe, since responsibility for the Convention has been assigned within DG IV to the Regional Planning and Technical Co-operation and Assistance Division, the title of which should very shortly be expanded in the interests of greater visibility to include the word "landscape". As the Convention itself recognises, it is essential to care not only for areas of outstanding beauty but also for ordinary, everyday and degraded areas. Many are the rural and peri-urban landscapes which are undergoing far-reaching changes and merit greater official and public concern. Regional planning policies thus have an important role to play.

It is my earnest wish that it will be possible in the future to introduce highly effective measures in response to the ever-increasing pressure of social demands. Landscapes

constitute a new sector of activity which remains to be organised. It is also essential, in the context of the Council of Europe, to promote a model for European co-operation in this field.

This conference will consist of three sessions. They will focus in turn on:

- a presentation of the European Landscape Convention and consideration of the stages that lie ahead, from its adoption to its implementation;
- an examination of the preparatory work that needs to be done before the Convention can enter into force;
- the Convention's implementation and forms of co-operation.