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COUNCIL OF EUROPE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION

11th COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONFERENCE ON THE EUROPEAN LANDSCAPE CONVENTION

*Conference organised under the auspices of the Presidency of Hungary
of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe*

Council of Europe
Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg
26-27 May 2021
Online meeting [Room 9]

Opening speech

*Mr Gerhard ERMISCHER,
Chair of the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations
to the Council of Europe*

It is a special pleasure for me, to have the privilege to address the Conference of the European Landscape Convention – as it was exactly this Convention which brought me to the Council of Europe. When the Convention was opened for signature 21 years ago in Florence, I was chairing a European Landscape Project. And one of our participants was English Heritage, represented by Graham Fairclough, one of the experts involved in the preparation of the Convention. He brought me in contact with the Council of Europe, or more exactly, with Maguelonne Déjeant-Pons. Well, at that moment I still made the classical mistake of mixing up the terms Council of Europe and European Council. That has changed dramatically since then for me.

I can proudly state that I have participated in the work of the Conference since the very first one as a civil society observer – which I guess makes me one of the few true veterans of the Conference. As a representative of our European Network, then my own institute, and finally, when we founded Civilscape as an umbrella organisation for NGOs dealing with landscape as a representative of an INGO, which was granted participative status with the Council of Europe. And so I finally came to learn about the Conference of INGOs and participate in this unique body of the Council of Europe.

I was sometimes quite critical to developments inside the Council of Europe as much as in the Conference of INGOs. So, I was finally asked to put my commitment where my mouth was – I was elected as member of the Standing Committee of the Conference in 2017. This was the moment when a fundamental reform process was started in the Conference, a reform process in which I have participated with great pleasure. We have made the Conference leaner, less bureaucratic, more reactive and more pro-active. The Plenary Assembly of the Conference adopted its new rules in December last year and elected a new Standing Committee and President at the end of April this year.

We will have to deal with many issues. As you can imagine the struggle for the Istanbul Convention, the situation in Belarus and the shrinking civil space in Europe keep us on our toes. But we will not forget, and we do not forget, that culture, environment and therefore also landscape are of great importance for the everyday life of the citizens not only of Europe but of the World. A landscape where people can live well, interact with each other and care for their environment, where they can participate in the management and development of their landscapes and can feel empowered and committed is essential for the wellbeing of all. Landscape is the one field where the great challenges of climate change, environment, heritage, culture and cultural diversity, economy, social well-being and political decision-making come together.

Therefore, the General Assembly of the “new” Conference, when deciding about the first new targeted committees in the April session, decided to create committees on landscape, environment and human rights. So, you can see that we are committed taking these areas very seriously and see them as key-priorities for our work, well connected to the great issues of democracy, human rights and sustainable development. So, I can ensure you that my own INGO will stay dedicated to your work and my dear colleagues at Civilscape will keep up the flag. And for the Conference we have already decided on our new representatives to the CDCPP and the European Landscape Convention. So would ask you to welcome Sophie Hüglin as our representative to the Landscape Convention. As she is an archaeologist as myself, she will have a very similar approach as me, and I know she is really keen on taking on her new task and is already with you today and tomorrow. Unfortunately, still in an online format, but I hope that at least the next workshops can be physical meetings again.

With Anna Sevortian we have a highly committed new representative to the CDCPP, who is not only strong on culture and education, but also a dedicated civil rights defender. So, we bring together the values and strength of the Conference to serve the values which are so dear to my own heart: culture, cultural heritage, nature and civil participation. In the past I have fought for these issues to stay high on the agenda of the Council of Europe, together with many representatives of civil society as well as many representatives of member states, and you can rest assured, that in my new role and function I will not forget my origins and where I come from – as far as the Council of Europe is concerned, that is the European Landscape Convention.

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