

The national landscape policy of Armenia

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Dear Colleagues, guests

Let me welcome all participants of the workshop dedicated to resolution of implementation of European Landscape Convention in Yerevan. I am happy to see my dear colleagues with whom we have worked for years on issues of landscape and spatial planning. I hope this conference will have its significant contribution to the essential work done by the European Council in these fields.

Now I would like to briefly introduce the activities carried out on the national level in our country.

First of all, I want to recall that in this boundless universe our planet Earth is the only place to harbor life . And despite the unprecedented progress of science in the last decades another suitable planet for life has not been found so far.

The Earth is a major cosmological mystery and the efforts of fully unrevealing it are not finished yet. Life on Earth is possible due to an exceptional balance of complex systems that provide living species with light, air, water and food. These fragile ecosystems form a perfect environment for living and serve as an ample and comfortable home for all of us. Therefore, preserving and cherishing our unique home with extreme responsibly and care is our duty as the only rational creatures inhabiting Earth.

The planet Earth is rich with various magnificent and admirable landscapes. They have been a source of inspiration for centuries and our duty is at least to maintain them for future generations, showing extremely balanced approach when creating man-made environments.

Along with the development of civilization the significant part of landscapes is being transformed under the influence of various human factors. Landscapes basically reflect both achievements and omissions of human activity thereby creating attractive or repellent characteristics of settlements, regions and countries.

This suggests an interesting consistency that landscapes create country's original image and reflect the system of values of people inhabiting a particular territory. Moreover, it has been proven that their physical and spiritual health directly depends on their living environment.

It is also important to assess that quality features of the landscape are essential for promoting or banning economic development, taking into consideration the quality of spatial and natural resources, recreational opportunities as well as various other circumstances.

In that sense a consistent implementation of landscape policy is aimed at creating comfortable and secure environment for living, working and leisure as well as on creating attractive environment for investments.

By ratifying The European Landscape Convention on 9 march 2004 Republic of Armenia undertook responsibilities to maintain natural and man-made landscape and properly implement the process of management and planning.

Why Landscape convention is especially important for Armenia?...

Let me mention some of these factors.

Sensitivity towards landscape is typical for Armenian spiritual values. The evidence is that Mountain Ararat is one of the country's symbols. It is pictured on the emblem of the Republic of Armenia.

It is symbolic that this year during the visit of Pope Francis to Armenia in June, doves of peace were launched from Khor Virap monastery towards the mountain Ararat.

Armenia is also known in the world with its Biblical sceneries, beautiful shaped high mountain ranges, deep canyons, rivers flowing across lowlands, grape and fruit gardens cultivated in the valleys.

Armenian historical and architectural monuments are perfect examples of harmony in natural and men-made creation.

The list of historical and cultural monuments approved by RA Government include over 24 thousand historical and cultural monuments, some of which are recognized by UNESCO as World Heritage sites (Sanahin, Haghat, Geghard, Edjmiatsin monastery complexes, valley of Azat river, Zvartnots archeological site).

The natural system of our country has some peculiarities that make the necessity of consistent solving of landscape problems more vivid:

Total area of the Republic of Armenia is 29,743 square kilometers, with population of 2,998,600 (estimated as 1 January, 2016). The territory of Armenia is mountainous, with 44% highlands not suitable for living. Settling system is disproportionate with extreme differences of indexes describing intensive and extensive used areas. It is also highly centered and is formed around the capital city - Yerevan.

At the same time the territory of Armenia is completely under seismic danger and is also prone to external geological processes such as landslides, collapses, downpours, floods.

These disasters affect the area of 700 square kilometers, which is 2,4% of country's total territory-damaging more than 100 settlements and about 1500 square kilometers of transportation and other communications.

Republic of Armenia has no access to the sea, it borders with Georgia, Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Turkey, Islamic Republic of Iran.

the border area is 7155 square kilometers and runs through 9 marzes with 1431km length and forms 24% of the territory of the Republic of Armenia. In border regions there are 9 urban and 173 rural communities, which is 20,7% of republic's rural settlements.

To sum up it is worth noting that;

Taking into account the small size of our country, geopolitical conditions, the absence of own energy resources, and the access to the sea, as well as limitation of land suitable for agriculture and resettlement, it is first of all extremely important to evaluate and stimulate resources of internal development; showing particular care and attention towards each piece of land.

These goals perfectly coincide with the ideology of the Convention, moreover the necessity of creating improved, attractive and neat landscapes becomes an imperative requirement.

Legislative regulation of landscape policy

In the framework of the implementation of the Convention a number of legal acts were adopted, main ones are displayed on the screen;

- 1) *RA National Assembly decision N-070-3 18 january, 2004 “on the Ratification of European Landscape Convention”*
- 2) *RA prime minister’s decision N 650-A 31 july 2009 on “Creation of Interdepartmental Commission to Coordinate the Implementation of European Landscape Convention in RA”*
- 3) *RA government decision N 308-N 24 march 2011 on “Confirmation of the Event List Arising from Implementation of Obligations of Republic of Armenia from 2011-2012 due to European Landscape Convention”*
- 4) *RA government protocol decision N45 the session of 17 november 2011 on “Approving Provisions of National Landscape Policy Implementation of Republic of Armenia”*
- 5) *RA Civil service council’s decision N 952-A 12 december 2011 on “Making Changes in RA Civil Service Council’s Decision N 657-A from 31 july, 2006”, where supplements were made in the training course of civil service in order to include landscape problems. In the post passports of civil servants the requirement of Convention knowledge is added.*
- 6) *RA government decision N164-N f romf16 february 2012 on “Defining Landscape Prize of Republic of Armenia”*
- 7) *RA Government protocol decision N29 the session of 19 july 2012 on “Approving the Strategy of Landscape Protection, Management and Planning and Prior and Mid-term Activities Arising from it ”*

Particularly, RA Government decisions stipulated the principles for implementation of the National Landscape Policy in Armenia, the Strategy for preservation, management and planning of landscapes and consecutively the derived priority and mid-term activities, annual Armenia Landscape Award was created, as well as RA Civil service council set up a requirement and updated its training materials with main topics of The Landscape Convention, including these topics in appropriate civil servants job entering requirements.

In order to coordinate the implementation of the European Landscape Convention an interinstitutional commission is formed, which includes representatives from public administration and local-government bodies, public, scientific and educational organizations.

Many of the problems related to natural and cultural landscapes are stipulated in the major legislative acts of the country: RA Land Code, RA Water Code, RA Mineral Resources Code, Forest Code, laws on “Specially Protected Natural Areas”, “The Expertise and Evaluation of Influence on the Environment”, “Protection and Use of Cultural and Historical Stationary Monuments and Historical Environment” and in other laws and legal acts.

According to the activities defined by the Landscape Strategy each year seminars were held in all marzes of Armenia in order to present information about the process of implementation of the Convention and raise awareness of landscape problems.

In this context It is important to note that efforts made on theoretical or legal issues are sufficiently integral. They form a favorable base for implementing landscape protection, management and planning in the Republic of Armenia. The same can't be stated in the case of practical steps aimed at the implementation of the Convention.

I think it is a serious challenge, and revealing its causal relationships requires an in-depth study. However, two of the reasons are obvious; underestimation and poor understanding of landscape problems by the society from one side and lack or absence of financing from the other.

A number of concepts were defined under the ideology of the Convention, which fall into the base of landscape policy.

The concept of landscape is defined as “area as perceived by people, whose character is the result of action or interaction of natural and human factors”

The definition suggests that in essence, the issue is about sustainable development of territories, about a kind of development that ensures the synergy of economic, social, ecological and cultural components. Moreover, the result created within this unity should react to perceptions and the vision of further development of the inhabitants.

By the way it is notable that about a century ago Jack London wrote in one of his works: "It is not what the landscape is, but what we are. If we were not, the landscape would remain, but without human significance. That is what we invest it with." It is interesting that such a perception of the famous writer fully coincides with the core ideology of the Convention.

Let me draw some parallels with the principles defined by the Convention and documents of spatial planning.

Convention functions in entire territory of countries involving not only valuable natural and cultural areas that are subject to protection, but also ordinary common environment, abandoned areas, degraded lands, etc.,

Similar objectives are marked in a number of documents of Council of Europe Conference of Ministers Responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning; CEMAT, including “Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent”, Charter of *Torremolinos*, etc.

Some comparative quotation about principles marked in above mentioned documents are shown on the screen.

European spatial planning Charter

Torremolinos Charter

Recommendation No. R (84)2 of the Committee of Ministers of Council of Europe

“Regional/spatial planning gives geographical expression to the economic, social, cultural and ecological policies of society.”

“Man and his well-being as well as his interaction with the environment are the central concern of regional/spatial planning, its aims being to provide each individual with an environment and quality of life conducive to the development of his personality in surroundings planned on a human scale.”

“Regional/spatial planning must take into consideration the existence of a multitude of individual and institutional decision-makers which influence the organization of space, the uncertainty of all forecasting studies, the market pressures, the special features of administrative systems and the differing socio-economic and environmental conditions. It must however strive to reconcile these influences in the most harmonious way possible.”

Guiding Principles for Sustainable Spatial Development of the European Continent

Committee of Ministers of Council of Europe, Recommendation No. (2002)1

“Landscapes are a significant part of European heritage and a witness of the past and present relationships between man and his natural and built environments.”

“Changes in town planning, transport, other types of infrastructure, are accelerating the transformation of European landscapes and can also have a negative impact on their quality and use. This not only concerns valuable natural landscapes, but applies generally to all types of cultural landscape, especially those that are an essential component of the urban environment.”

“Spatial development policy can contribute to protecting, managing and enhancing landscapes by adopting appropriate measures, in particular by organising better interactions between various sectoral policies with regard to their territorial impacts.”

According to the definition in the Convention “Landscape planning” is constant action aimed at foreclosing of prospective development, restoration and formation of landscape.

The above definition suggests that the objectives and problems of spatial development are closely interrelated with landscape management issues and are result of each other. In the light of the Convention considering the issues of landscape improvement inevitably leads to understanding of dominant role of landscape planning functions.

The sphere of spatial development and planning is regulated by the law of Republic of Armenia on “Urban Development” and a number of legal acts, where three level specification of spatial planning documents that requires compulsory elaboration are documented for national, regional and local levels.

In accordance with the legislation of Republic of Armenia spatial planning documents are developed in three main stages;

- I. Examination and analysis of the current state of the territory in question
- II. Comprehensive evaluation of the territory taking into consideration numerous natural and anthropogenic factors. In this stage map of risks and limitations is developed.

In a separate section (with graphical and text representation and tables) the outline of landscape issues are developed, within which the classification and assessment of landscapes is performed. Then the assessed and classified landscape zones are categorized by operating regimes, the specific and essential preservation procedures are stipulated and suggestions on development, improvement or creation of landscapes are presented.

- III. The prospective development stage, in essence, represents the vision for further development of the territory and the system of conservation, management and planning procedures required for this purpose. It includes program provisions for urban development plans of spatial development, plans of improvement and development of engineering and

transportation infrastructure, changes of target use of plots of land (with transformation of land plot category), coordinate notes and adjacent tables, etc.

Combining three stages of planning with landscape main activities, it becomes obvious that they coincide with “identification -> assessment -> definition of landscape quality objectives” chain. Principles arising from landscape policy are effective tools for implementing spatial planning with interdisciplinary approach and real programs.

Landscape policy, urbanization and latest agenda of sustainable development

The 70's of XX century were marked with drastic increase of anthropogenic pressures on the environment. Progressive development of industry, urban development, engineering and transportation infrastructure, tourism, etc., as well as global change in the world economy combined with limitations in natural resources and problems of ecological deterioration gave birth to new challenges, and the necessity to resist them led the global community to forming the ideology of sustainable development.

Historically urbanization has always had the role of stimulator of economic growth and development. Though, along with that, it is obvious that the threat of possible negative impact of human activity on the environment mainly arise in urbanized areas. Referring to the problems of urban development of settlements, it should be noted that being a permanent component of human history these issues today are subject of interest for the world society, especially due to an unprecedented and continuous growth of urban population in the world.

On the screen you can see the graph showing the dynamic growth of urban population through years.

If in 1880's 3% of population lived in cities, in 2008 the number exceeds 50%. Currently the average urbanization level in the world is 54%, but in separate countries (North America, Latin America,) it reaches 80%. Scientists predict that during following two decades the number of urban population will be doubled.

For this reason, social, cultural and economic development of countries is conditioned by the significant increase of cities system role; highly urbanizing the directions of solving existing problems. Therefore, nowadays problem of urban and rural settlements, as well as the issue of harmonious development of suburban landscape is of essential importance, taking into consideration the circumstances and effects that are reasons for landscape changes.

In essence, being based on the ideology of harmonization of natural and man-made environments and revealing the ways of preventing negative anthropogenic impacts on the landscape the Convention can be deemed as an effective tool for reaching the objectives of sustainable development.

Therefore, in order to refrain from unfavorable effects of the economic development on landscapes special attention should be drawn to the issues of urbanized landscapes protection, management and planning with applying methods of spatial and landscape planning. This situation dictates the necessity to identify important challenges for the development of the cities.

As it is known, the new sustainable development agenda, accepted by the UN summit in September 2015, officially came into force since the 1st of January 2016.

This ambitious program which is a starting platform for international society and national governments and is unanimously accepted by all 193 member states, will be a guideline for focusing efforts on reaching 17 global objectives (including 169 issues) of sustainable development by 2030.

Close interconnection of the new sustainable development agenda and landscape policy is especially clearly expressed in the 11th global objective, in the context of principles recorded in the framework of global objective of “Sustainable cities and communities”.

This year another important event will take place in Ecuador, *Habitat III* (United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development) named “For better urban future”, on the way to which in 2015 UN Habitat accepted the document; “International guidelines on urban and territorial planning”.

It is expected that during the summit a new urban agenda is going to be adopted as an outcome document to be implemented in the following 20 years.

“Sustainable cities and settlements for all” Quito declaration especially states.

“It is expected that by 2050 urban population will be nearly doubled, making urbanization one of the 21st century’s most important challenges. As economic activities, social, ecological and cultural interactions of people are mostly centered in cities, therefore threats for sustainable development are focused in these areas.”

“We adopt this new Urban agenda as a collective vision and political commitment to promote and implement sustainable urban development, and as a historic chance to comprehend core role of cities and settlements as the driving force of sustainable development in the urbanized world.”

“We undertake the commitment to propel development of spatial framework of cities including tools of urban planning and projection, that assist sustainable management and use of land and natural resources, reasonable compactness and density, polycentrism and mixed use, strategies of planed urban expansion /if they are applicable/, raise the effectiveness of resource use, urban flexibility and sustainability of environment.”

“We undertake the commitment to use the approach of smart city, that enables use of digitizing tools, clean energy and technologies, thereby ensuring population in issues of making ecologically friendly solutions and promoting sustainable economic growth.”

“Planning and management of urban spatial development.”

“We will implement integrated planning, the aim of which is to balance short-term needs with long-term desired results, competitive economy, high quality of life, and issues of sustainable environment. We will seek to secure the flexibility of our plans to adapt with social and economic conditions that are changing with the course of time. We will implement and systematically evaluate these projects making efforts to assure the innovations of technologies and better environment.”

Urbanization has currently become one of the most important challenges of the 21st century; taking into account its unprecedented drastic increase in the world, the threats endangering the sustainable development are centered exactly in these areas.

It is also noted that the New Urban agenda is evaluated as a collective vision and a political commitment to stimulate and implement sustainable urban development. Key role of cities and settlements is stressed as a driving force of sustainable development in the urbanizing world.

The importance of green and quality public areas is indicated in a number of provisions, which assist to the wellbeing, health, social and cultural interactions, coexistence and social inclusion of people.

The necessity of urban spatial framework development is stressed, including promotion of urban planning tools that increase efficiency of resource utilization, urban flexibility and environmental sustainability.

It is stressed that in the issues of expanding cities, provision of infrastructures and services, compact design and sustainable density of population, as well as integration of suburb districts in the structure of cities policymakers should be guided by planning.

The efficiency of smart city approach in choosing more beneficial solutions and promoting sustainable economic growth with provision of opportunities to use digitizing tools, clean energy and technologies is also noted.

Another chapter is dedicated to the issues of spatial development, urban planning and management.

Implementation of integrated planning is of a particular importance, the aim of which is to balance short-term needs with long-term desired results, competitive economy, high quality of life, and issues of sustainable environment.

In essence objectives of above mentioned documents are basically called to define principles of sustainable development of urbanized landscapes.

Therefore, functions of landscape policy implementation should be closely interconnected with the approaches and recommendations documented in the Global agenda.

Armenia is one of those countries that has sufficiently high level of urbanization. Urban population reached its peak in 1990 with 69.1%, after which a certain growth of rural population began, which was mainly conditioned by closing of industrial factories and land privatization in villages in 1990's. As of 2016 the urbanization coefficient in Armenia is 63.6%.

However, current level of urbanization is especially worrying in the sense that more than a half (1 071.5 million people) or 56% of the urban and 35% (1 071.5 million) of county's population is concentrated in the capital Yerevan.

The above mentioned target topics are covered by the ministry in the draft law "On Development in Small City Center of Yerevan".

The main objective of the draft law is to put a legal base on ensuring the architectural unity of Yerevan small city center along with the development of the city, improvement of the aesthetic construction environment, creation of healthy and attractive living environment through fixing special and additional conditions rising from the features of the particular spatial zone. One of the important expectations connected with drafting the law is the definition of mechanisms aimed at solution of issues of small center relief and prevention of trends of overurbanization. In essence the draft law is aimed at regulation of development in the most important urbanized landscape area of our country.

Lately the government of Armenia has presented the draft law for discussion in the National Assembly.

As it was mentioned above the rapid growth in world urbanization is paired with increasing human pressure on natural and cultural landscapes, often leading to deterioration of quality of life and comfort for urban population.

On the other hand the imperative requirement to respond to and to use new economic and technological developments challenges cities;

How to simultaneously ensure the balance between competitiveness of cities and conditions of sustainable development...?

Is there an opportunity for compromise...?

The above mentioned circumstances has led to adoption of a number of innovative concepts in the field of cities development on international platforms, such as "green city" "livable city", "resilient city", "sustainable city", "smart city", "happy city". The latter is especially a desired formulation for me. These concepts have different accentuation but are aimed at one general objective which is to create a favorable and safe environment where natural, cultural and technological components are harmoniously interconnected.

In recent years the topic of "smart city" is widely spread, in the framework of which numerous programs are successfully implemented in different countries of the world.

In April 2015 Armenia joined to the program of "United smart cities" implemented by UNECE, choosing Goris as a pilot city. Strategic aim of "United smart cities" program is to promote sustainable development of cities, with the help of more effective and transparent utilization of human and natural resources, creation of proper capacities including the use of advanced technologies.

For small and medium sized cities in developing countries that have limited financial resources and therefore limited opportunities it is much more difficult to develop smart city solutions. The situation these communities face, including all above mentioned problems, has the possibility of becoming critical and irreversible in the case of no immediate actions. On the contrary, if urban development approaches are skillfully reconsidered and applied in a timely manner, they will carry fundamental potential for ensuring sustainable development in practice.

As a result of extensive research and analysis carried out during Goris pilot program, as well as on the base of discussions with state and local authorities, professional circles, nongovernmental organizations and city population, currently together with national and international experts the description of smart city of Goris is being prepared, the list of indicators which are going to be the base for city development and monitoring is also clarified.

The next step of the program will be evaluation of initiative's results and development of the "Package of smart results", which in turn may serve as a major stimulus for a multiplicative effect on

achieving the sustainable urban development goals in the Republic of Armenia. This will also be one of our country's contributions in the worldwide process aimed at implementation of New Global Urban Agenda.

Dear Colleagues.

Highlighting the necessity of ensuring interconnection between sustainable development policies and landscape policies in urbanized areas I suggest to direct the upcoming actions of EU Landscape Convention as well as CEMAT towards the issues of development of urbanized landscapes and settlements.

I believe all of us will agree that the solution of such crucial problems will demand close international cooperation directed at formation of general vision for the future of the cities. The vision should be flexible enough for member states of Council of Europe from the point of view of localization in accordance with the features of their countries. It should also be clear and pursue the key objective of turning cities and settlements into a better place for living.

I think the most important step to succeed is to make united efforts in the direction of implementing the aims of landscape policy for the sake the of future that we desire”

In this context, let me quote the eloquent expression by Seneca:

"If one does not know to which port one is sailing, no wind is favorable."

Thank you for your attention.