Eighteenth Council of Europe Meeting of the Workshops for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention (5 October2016): general debate on strategies and policy documents in favour of the landscape: challenges and opportunities (Sarah De Meyer)

Dear colleagues,

The policy plans proposed during this workshop all have an intrinsic pioneering nature. The visions, strategies and measures are inspirational and instructive. The speakers have demonstrated how important it is to transform strategic visions into an actual implementation agenda. Their practical translation is, of course, necessary in order to be able to undertake targeted actions and to deploy a full range of instruments. It is most certainly interesting to see how this is organised in various countries and to learn the way in which these policy plans have been achieved thanks to a broad cooperation. I assume we are all convinced that these initiatives should be imitated in the other member states of the Council of Europe. Last year, during the last conference of the Council of Europe about the implementation of the European Landscape Convention, it transpired that this is the case in an increasing number of countries. Many member states are currently working on national or regional landscape strategies, many accompanied by an action plan. That is definitely encouraging.

Encouraging because all these initiatives help ensure that the message of the European Landscape Convention is internalised. This makes it possible for the landscape to become, step by step, a permanent facet of a sustainable spatial development. This aim is contained in quite a few recommendations and resolutions adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Take, for example, *the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to the Member States of the Council of Europe on the Guiding principles for sustainable spatial development of the European continent* and *the Ljubljana Declaration on the territorial dimension of spatial development*. In this, an emphatic argument is made for a participative planning policy that arises from a close collaboration between sectors and between administrative levels. The Committee of Ministers has repeatedly referred to the role played by landscape and cultural heritage in the field of territorial and social cohesion.

In April 2016, the European Ministers of Culture approved the *Namur Declaration.* This argues for a strategy that allows the European heritage policy to cater better to the (new) challenges raised in the 21st century. In *the European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st century,* prepared by the CDCPP, heritage, landscape, territorial governance en sustainable development are again key terms. The European Landscape Convention should effect the formulation of common solutions to the main challenges facing European society today. If we wish to fulfil this ambition, we must involve policy and society in a whole range of ways. Drawing up a landscape policy plan seems a handy tool for this. But there is also a lot more than that. The policy plan offers a framework for managing future developments in an holistic, multi-scaled and multi-disciplinary manner. The plan can serve as the first step towards systematically embedding the landscape approach in policy and governance.

In the Flemish Region, we notice that this landscape approach is being proposed from a variety of perspectives. This is taking place both within government and outside it. There is a demand for a different planning system, where spatial co-production is not the exception but rather the rule. The realisation is growing that space must be organised in a more sustainable way if we are to address the many social challenges of the 21st century. This realisation has largely emerged from the transformation processes taking place in the open space in Flanders. These transformations are visible in the structures, functions and qualities of the open space. By “open space” we mean all space that does not go hand in hand with building or asphalting.

The Government of Flanders also acknowledges the need for an integrated approach towards spatial development. In the Coalition agreement 2014-2019, the Government of Flanders expressed the wish to pursue a dynamic open space policy. The open space policy must arise from an integrated vision that takes into account water management, landscape and nature, but also recreation, possible ecosystem services, agriculture, food production and immovable heritage. This is a striking policy intention. In line with this, a number of innovative initiatives have been taken for the open space. The initiatives implicitly support the objectives of the European Landscape Convention. They argue

emphatically for a different way of dealing with the space, based on the characteristics and logic of the landscape.

Thus a future scouting is carried out for the Flemish open space. The scenarios are currently being tested by a forum that brings together Flemish administrations and local authorities. The results will help shape the future policy. Furthermore, recent research by design, called "*The ambition of the territory*", has also demonstrated how the landscape actors join forces around common challenges and shared interests. The study calls for a radical reversal of the spatial planning, whereby solving conflicts of interest makes way for searching for spatial synergies. Another study, called "*Metropolitan landscapes*", proves that it is no longer sustainable to formulate future perspectives for the landscape by policy sector.

The increased policy attention for the open space offers opportunities to include the landscape in the social debate and to place it more emphatically on the future policy agenda. In the Flemish Region, the implementation of the European Landscape Convention is traditionally directed from the Immovable Heritage policy field. The above mentioned intentions and initiatives show that now is the time to explicitly address landscape as a transversal policy issue. The results of this Meeting shall most certainly contribute to that.