

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished guests, lecturers and participants!

I am particularly pleased that this conference is being held under the joint organisation of the Ministry of Construction and Physical Planning headed by me, the Croatian Institute for Spatial Development, and in particular the Council of Europe – the Secretariat of the European Landscape Convention, in the year in which Croatia is presiding the Council of Europe.

I greet, therefore, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Croatia and of the Ministry of Construction also:

- the Chair of the Convention Ms Sanja Lješković Mitrović, and
- the Executive Secretary of the Convention Ms Maguelonne Dejeant-Pons,

whom I thank both for having given, during the conference preparations as well as by their today's attendance, their contribution and an international context to this conference.

I would also like to thank other distinguished colleagues for their introductory speeches, as well as all foreign and Croatian lecturers who shall, during the day, share with us part of their knowledge and experience.

If we look around us, it is obvious that we live in a beautiful country, abounding in exceptional natural attractions and valuable architectural heritage. All this makes part of our perception of the landscape.

Croatia must develop, in line with economic needs, however also in line with all those aspects that are expected to be fulfilled by us, in concord with the times we live in.

However, what is essential to be pointed out?

Landscape is not an abstract notion or theme, to which someone could claim an exclusive right. It represents the space that we inherit, a space sensitive to the impacts and activities that leave a trace in it: construction, transport, tourism, energy, agriculture and forestry, mining, water management and many other activities. And it is our task to protect our space, all our natural beauties for our generations to come.

What physical planning links closer with landscape is the fact that by the physical planning system spatial projects are planned in the entire national territory, both the built parts of it, as well as in the unbuilt parts. Physical

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planning establishes the link between the activities in space and the space itself, it determines the manner, conditions and measures for the realisation of spatial projects, as projects that are not contained in spatial plans are not allowed to be realised.

In recent times we are faced with intense population emigration, especially from rural into urban areas, and all this has also an impact on landscape transformation. This is a high-profile theme that engages the public, and it is good that it is so.

Citizens, however, expects us not to talk only about this, but to take specific action. It is up to this Government to act concretely.

Therefore, on this occasion, I shall also mention the measures undertaken by the Ministry of Construction and Physical Planning that are aimed at aiding young people in solving their housing issue. I am referring to the measures of state subsidised housing and subsidisation of housing loans. To date, owing to these measures, 13 000 families now have their own homes. I shall particularly mention the fact that in the subsidisation measure we have included the development index, which means that higher subsidies are awarded to young people who buy an apartment or house or build a house in rural areas, or less developed areas respectively.

The intention of this Government and of our ministry is to put a maximum effort into making Croatia again a country desirable to live and work in.

The Republic of Croatia is a signatory of the European Landscape Convention and ratified it by the respective Act on Convention Ratification, which was adopted in 2002 and came into effect in 2004. The Protocol on Amendments to the Convention is a further topical theme and represents continued care for the landscape at the European level; the Republic of Croatia is about to consider initiating its ratification procedure in cooperation with several ministries involved in this theme in their specific way.

By organising this conference, and by intensifying the activities related to landscape within the scope of physical planning at the national level, the ministry shall further on continue enhancing the care for the landscape, fostering thereby cooperation among all public-law bodies, the scope of which has an impact on some of the landscape components.

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And finally, I am particularly pleased to have the honour to open this conference, on occasion of marking for the second time the International Landscape Day of the Council of Europe.

I wish all of you, who have decided to share today's non-working day here with us, a successful and interesting continuation of the conference!

Thank you!