



Transparency and rent levels are key issues in European energy efficiency actions

The Energy performance of buildings directive is a tricky matter to grasp. Ms Barbara Steenbergen, Head of the IUT liaison office to the EU unravels the details for us.

Q: Ms Steenbergen, you have closely followed the process leading up to the signing of the EPBD. What are your thoughts on the matter?

A: I think we have different levels of awareness in the European countries. In some countries we are quite far in energy efficiency actions in the housing sector, in others we are in a starters' position. At European level we are now deciding about the recast of the EPBD.

Q: A political agreement has been reached in the European Parliament. What are the next steps in the procedures?

A: We expect ratification in May 2010. After the ratification the member states have been given a two year time frame to implement the new EPBD in national legislation.

Q: What direct impact does the EPBD have on the member states?

A: First and foremost the directive is the framework for national law in the member states. The current EPBD from 2002 calls on member states to introduce five main items: a common methodology for the energy performance calculation, energy performance certificates, setting of minimum energy requirements, inspection of heating and cooling systems and requirements for experts and inspectors.

Q: The EPBD states that existing buildings have to be renovated and become more energy efficient. The wording "major renovations" is used. Is it up to the tenants to foot the bill?

A: The question if the EPBD leads to increased rents is the key issue. Major renovations have to be paid by the landlords but in many national rent systems modernization costs can be split on the rents. According to these rules the tenant pays the renovations at the end to a smaller or bigger amount. In my opinion there is no alternative to the energy efficient retrofitting of the housing stock. The costs especially for fossil energy are rising and we call them the "second rent". It is crucial that we need a



When winter hits hard, energy costs run high.

balance between the costs for the landlords and the tenants.

Q: What about a major redirection of the structural funds to cover costs?

A: Currently 4% of each country allocated ERDF funds (in total 8 billion Euros) over the period 2007 to 2013 can be used to co finance energy efficiency measures in the existing housing stock. ERDF money can be redirected to housing projects. This breakthrough decision came with the European economic recovery plan (EERP) in December 2008.

Q: Is the EPBD applicable for all the member states?

A: Yes, the EPBD is applicable for the EU-27. The retrofitting in Eastern and Southern European countries with a lot of private housing and privatized flats will be the most difficult issue to deal with. In the privatized flats we have many "poor owners", tenants who had the possibility to buy their flats but have no money to invest even in maintenance.

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“The question if the EPBD leads to increased rents is the key issue”

An option could be the combination of ERDF funding with loans from the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Development Bank (CEB). The JESSICA Urban for instance provide long term loans with a low interest rate. The loans will be offered to home owners in multi apartment buildings.

Q: A certification system is en route. Which institution will monitor the usage of the system and make sure that landlords and member states do not cheat or avoid using the system altogether?

A: This is depending on the national executive. In many cases the local authorities for construction and environment will be in charge of monitoring.

Q: What type of buildings must have the certificate?

A: Energy certificates will be required for any building constructed, sold or rented out to a new tenant. The certificates will have to provide recommendations for improvement and may include additional information as the annual energy consumption and percentage of renewable energy.

Q: The energy certificates will contain recommendations for modernizations. Is it an obligation as a landlord or owner to follow the recommendations or can they be ignored?

A: According to the ruling in the EPBD they are just recommendations. But this information is useful for the tenants. The recommendations are objective information what investments should be made in the near future such as new heating systems, new windows, insulation and solar panels. Member states are free to go for stricter national regulations to achieve their climate and energy saving goals. The direct benefit for the tenants is the transparency regulation. The energy performance indicator has to be published in all commercial advertisements for real estates from 2012 on. Existing energy certificates can also be displayed in public spaces, for instance the entrance halls of the buildings.

Q: Transparency is obviously an important issue here. As a tenant, how are you supposed to interpret the certificate correctly?

A: IUT wanted to have a maximum level of transparency for the applicant on the housing market. The best way would be to lean on the energy labeling already existing for consumer goods. But member states are free to install their own labeling systems which are actually a pity. The regulation would be much more transparent if we'd have one labeling system in Europe.

State assistance case settled after agreement reached by the Commission and Dutch authorities

The EU Commission has endorsed an agreement with the Dutch national government permitting the Netherlands to continue providing financial assistance to housing corporations. The Dutch housing corporations are a vital part of the country's social housing system and they are now able to continue borrowing money at more favourable interest rates.

A key aspect of the agreement is the state assistance rules for the corporations which are: At least 90 % of the rented accommodations with a rent below the maximum rent allowance limit (approximately 648 Euro) must, when available, be allocated to households with an income up to 33 000 Euro. This affects 43 % of Dutch households. Another key aspect is that the Netherlands may continue providing state assistance for construction and rental of buildings with a social function such as community schools and youth centres.

Source: Ministry of Housing, Spatial Planning and the Environment. The Netherlands.

EU EVENTS

The EU Sustainable Energy Week, Brussels
22-23 March
More info: <http://www.eusew.eu/>

Director General Meetings, in Madrid:
27 April: Preparatory meeting of Directors of Housing ministers. Theme: Housing
28 April: Preparatory meeting of Directors of Housing ministers. Theme: Urban Development

Informal Ministerial Meetings, in Toledo,
Theme: Housing and Urban Rehabilitation
21 June: Housing ministers
22 June: Urban Development Ministers

High Level Conference, in Madrid:
26-27 April: “Sustainable Building, Revitalisation and Rehabilitation of districts”.
More info:
<http://www.eu2010.es/en/index.html>

Please meet the new board of the Confédération Nationale du Logement in France



The Secretary General of IUT Mr. Magnus Hammar alongside Ms. Barbara Steenbergen, head of the liaison office to the EU travelled to Paris, France to meet with the new board of Confédération Nationale du Logement. Front row left to right: Mr. Magnus Hammar, Mr. Serge Incerti Formentini, the president of the CNL and Ms. Barbara Steenbergen. Back row from left to right: Mr. Philippe Denizot, Ms. Stéphanie Sotison, Mr. Didier Pavageau, Ms. Corinne Rinaldo and Mr. Eddie Jaquemart, board member of IUT representing CNL.

Photo: Mr. H. Aïssaoui

NOTABLE AND QUOTABLE

A new urban intergroup has been formed in the European Parliament and has also been officially approved. The first meeting is scheduled in February 2010. Ms Barbara Steenbergen, the head of the liaison office in Brussels welcomes the new group. “IUT has actively supported the foundation of a new urban intergroup in the European Parliament and IUT is an official partner of it.” Mr. Jan Olbrycht (EPP) will chair the group.

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