

Ladies and gentlemen, participants of the conference,

I bring you this appeal from the Latvian people, victims of apartment houses denationalization in Latvia, their pain and hope.

During the period of time from 1991 up to 2002 in Latvia there had been denationalized about **10 thousands** apartment houses containing more than **78 thousands** flats in them where there lived close to **a quarter of a million** of persons.

The restitution of apartment houses in Latvia 60 years after their nationalization by the former government of Latvia in 1940 turned into a tragedy for **10%** of Latvian people. This tragedy by its severity and its heavy consequences many times exceeds Stalin's repressions in 1940 – 1947.

In distinction to the way in which the restitution of apartment houses had been carried out in some other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, where the housing rights of tenants of the former municipal flats in denationalized houses were secured and protected by the state, the restitution of apartment houses in Latvia had been carried out in the most severe and inhuman way.

In Latvia multistory apartment houses were denationalized and given in private possession to heirs (in many cases false) of the former house owners regardless of their relationship degree with the former house owner, regardless of their citizenship and country of residence, regardless of the house reconstruction degree during these 60 years.

Apartment houses had been given to private possession together with the tenants of the former municipal flats in them, without relocation of these tenants to other municipal houses and without paying them compensation so that they could buy flats in the market of habitation. In such a way at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> centuries there had been established **serfdom** in Latvia!

As a result of the restitution of apartment houses the rights of the tenants of denationalized houses had been significantly reduced in comparison with the rights of the tenants in municipal houses. They could not privatize their flats using their privatization certificates (vouchers), they could not exchange their flat for another without permission of the new house owner, they could not let the flat for sub rent, etc.

Many heirs of the former house owners after having received in their private property apartment houses and not willing to be engaged in administration of these houses sold their houses together with the "sitting tenants" to some businessmen, who in their turn resold the houses (again with the "sitting tenants") to other businessmen. As a result, now most of the denationalized houses are in the possession of dealers and not heirs of the former house owners.

Getting in their private possession apartment houses aggravated with "sitting tenants" and willing to get rid of this burden the new house owners unleashed a real terror against undesirable tenants, creating for them unbearable conditions of life in the houses in common and in the flats particularly and forcing them out by disconnecting central heating, hot and cold water supply, electricity, gas, dismantling roofs, ceilings, changing locks in entrance doors, forbidding to use cellars and lofts.

The rulers of Latvia remain deaf to complaints of the denationalized houses' tenants against new house owners' tyranny. Even more, the Parliament of Latvia (Saeima), where there is a very strong lobby of house owners, accepted a number of changes in laws which consecutively aggravated the situation of "sitting tenants". Starting from the year 2002 there had been introduced for these tenants each year progressively increasing rent, and there had been put an obligation on them to provide profit to their landlords, etc. Latvian courts had been given rights to evict tenants from their flats in the street because of the rent debt in amount of 3 months, without providing them any other dwelling.

According to official statistics for a period of time from 1995 to 2006 by court judgments there had been evicted from denationalized houses without providing any other dwelling **8 thousands households** or **25 thousands persons**. The number of the evicted includes many families with juvenile children and old people. How many households were forced out of their flats by new house owners without court judgments – there is no official statistics.

Tenants of denationalized houses exist in the condition of constant stress and strain, frustration, under constant fear to be evicted in the street, in uncertainty in their future. They are made social outcasts in Latvia and in Common Europe as well. To them does not apply provisions of the basic documents on human rights of UN and Common Europe.

One ancient philosopher has said: “No one can enter the same river twice”. The restitution of property in post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe represents an attempt to get back to the past.

The restitution of property in post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe had been laid down as one of the main obligatory conditions to the countries willing to join Common Europe. This requirement of the Council of Europe has led to mass tragedy of 7.5 millions of inhabitants of Common Europe – the former tenants of municipal flats. Therefore, it is a duty of the Council of Europe to take urgent measures for the liquidation of negative consequences of the restitution of apartment houses.

Thank you for attention.

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