



Slovak HOUSING: Problems for tenants in restituted flats persist

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Some few, only about 900 tenants from Slovakia, have had the possibility to register themselves as living in restituted houses. The Ministry of Construction and Regional Development, therefore, extended the deadline to register for three months, until the end of March.

The civic association *Právo na bývanie* (Eng. Right to Housing) on Thursday, January 22, organised a meeting at the Zičiho Place in the old town of Bratislava, by its chairman Mr Kristián Straka.

The meeting described the problems about the rents, for both tenants and the owners, of restituted buildings, and that they should be maintained in restituted houses at the present level until the issue is resolved legally.

"I have been living in my former state home (now private) for decades. Hundreds of thousands of people (in houses built by the state) have been able to buy them and we have not had that possibility," stated Ms Anna Klimová. She also read a reply from the Ombudsman, which has taken no initiative on this issue.

"I am glad that Minister Tomanová, (of Social Affairs) is taking action and who, in a letter, explains the situation." said Ms Klimová.

Following the debate at the meeting a lady who has been living in a legally acquired flat for 54 years in the centre of Bratislava described her situation. She said that without her knowledge the ownership had changed, and she now lives in an uncertain future. Similarly, many other members of the association said they felt discriminated against and contend that their houses had been acquired through means of fraud. When they complain about the unsatisfactory living conditions, energy supply is cut off and owners create other intentional problems.

Mr. Straka expressed his disappointment on the absence of official representatives from the Old Town administration but said that he was happy to welcome a foreign guest, the Secretary-General of the International Union of Tenants (IUT) Mr Magnus Hammar.

Mr Hammar said in his introduction, that he had not come to Bratislava to hand out keys for new flats, or to ready solve the housing problems, but to learn more about the situation and get specific information. During the day Mr Hammar had met with Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Family Ms Viera Tomanová. Mr Hammar had also visited some households, of which one household had not had any heating for almost two years.

"In many countries in Central and Eastern Europe there is a lack of social responsibility from the state, and increased social responsibility and solidarity is needed, including from the governments. Mr Hammar pointed out the necessity of the establishment of non governmental associations, because the individual person can do nothing or very little. He mentioned a good example, from Slovenia, where the tenant association together with the international umbrella organization of the homeless (FEANTSA) has submitted a complaint to the European Court of Human Rights, concerning the situa-

tion of tenants in restituted flats. The complaint was found admissible on 8th December 2008, and by February 20 the Slovenian government must reply to the complaint. The Slovenian case and situation is very similar to the situation in this country.

Mr Hammar also pointed out that a home is not a commodity such as a car or television. A safe home is necessary for normal family life and the upbringing of children. The association Right to Housing (*Právo na bývanie*) is member of IUT since 2008. IUT has existed since 1926 and brings together members from 45 countries, including Australia and Africa.