



April 2015

State of North Rhine-Westphalia signed European Declaration on Responsible Housing

February 23rd, the North Rhine Westphalia's Housing Minister, Mr **Michael Groschek**, signed the European Declaration on Responsible Housing.¹ «I welcome the expressed intentions and explicitly subscribe the Declaration. The statements made correspond in many points with the policy objectives in North Rhine-Westphalia. We need a socially balanced housing policy to provide people also in the future with sufficient affordable and quality accommodation, especially in booming urban areas. Therefore I call upon the housing providers to join the ambitions of the Declaration».²



Barbara Steenbergen (IUT Brussels) with Michael Groschek (NRW Housing Minister) and Felix von Grünberg (Chair of DMB-NRW)

Minister Groschek's signature represents an important added value to the Responsible housing initiative, considering that NRW is a German state of 18 million inhabitants. The IUT is having talks with French partner DELPHIS on other ways to go on with the ERHIN project, as EU financing ended last year.

Background meeting with Czech MEP on energy efficiency

February 25th, the IUT Brussels delegation met with **Pavel Poc**, Czech MEP of the S&D Group and vice Chair of the ENVI committee in the European Parliament.³ It was the right time to discuss about EU energy policies. Mr Poc agreed on the need to increase energy efficiency in rented dwellings without producing welfare losses for the tenants. Current EU legislation does not provide enough guarantees and incentives to achieve this goal; therefore more efforts must be made by EU legislators in the coming years.

The meeting was organised by **Milan Taraba**, President of SON.

TPAS-IUT workshop in Glasgow

Barbara Steenbergen spoke at the Chartered Institute of Housing's conference March 10th, in Glasgow.⁴ For the record, Margaret Burgess – Scottish Minister for Housing and Welfare – was the first supporter of the European Declaration on Responsible Housing. Barbara presented the

¹ The Declaration, translated in different languages, and the list of supporters is available at:

<http://www.responsiblehousing.eu/en/Responsible-Housing/European-Declaration-on-Responsible-Housing/>

² Press release in German at:

http://www.mbwsv.nrw.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/Archiv_2015/2015_02_24_Verantwortungsvolle_Wohnungswirtschaft/index.php

³ More information on Pavel Poc MEP at:

http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/96715/PAVEL_POC_home.html

⁴ More information available at:

http://www.cih.org/scotlandconferencehighlights?utm_source=Chartered+Institute+of+Housing&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=5453839_CIH+Scotland+2015+day+three+highlights&dm_i=YRX,38W7J,HDWRGI,BMG3Z,1

initiative and the principles for a “social rent law”. The workshop was moderated by **Lesley Baird**, Chief Executive of TPAS Scotland. Many NGOs are striving to improve tenants’ legal situation in the Scottish private rented sector. The IUT has been invited to a follow-up conference which will take place in Edinburgh next June.

A new strategy for the real estate sector

A significant amount of EU legislation impacts this sector; however EU policy developments in the field are neither strategic nor coherent. The IUT joined a **RICS** initiative to draw the attention of the European Commission to the importance of the real estate sector. Through a letter co-signed by 41 organisations, members of the European Housing Forum and/or the European Real Estate Forum, the signatories asked for a long term approach which should result in policy measures supporting sustainable growth, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity. The letter aims to get a meeting with **Jean-Claude Juncker**, President of the Commission, and **Frans Timmermans**, First Vice President.

Pole Europe: jour fixe with CNL on European issues

As part of the activities of its new presidency, *la CNL* – the biggest French tenants union – set up a new working group focussing on international and European issues (*Pole Europe et internationale*). Its members are CNL executives and experts, including tenants’ representatives from French Overseas regions (e.g. La Réunion). IUT Brussels is regularly invited to the meetings, which are aimed at developing joint actions. The working group is also a place for mutual exchange of information and experiences.

First Commission answer to request for “Almunia Package” revision

Jutta Steinruck MEP tabled a written question⁵ to the European Commission about the limitation of social housing to « disadvantaged groups».

⁵ Full text available at:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=WQ&reference=P-2015-002640&language=EN>

According to the German MEP of the S&D Group, the current EU definition of the target group «is not compatible with Protocol No 26 to the TFEU». MEP Steinruck asked the Commission if it is aware of the consequences of limiting social housing to a restricted group (notably tenants stigmatisation and marginalisation of the social housing sector), and therefore if it is intending to delete such definition when revising the “Almunia package”.



Jutta Steinruck MEP

In her answer to the written question,⁶ Commissioner on Competition **Margrethe Vestager** stated that «it is for Member states to determine the nature and scope of services of general interest like social housing» and that they «retain the right to define the social mix they consider most appropriate to reach their objective». She added that national decisions are «only subject to review by the Commission for manifest errors». The problem lies actually in this review. Social housing is part of national welfare systems; it is a national policy instrument on which the Commission should have no voice. By her answer Commissioner Vestager just took time, waiting for a final decision on the Dutch case, which is still pending before the European Court of Justice. The Court will decide on the merit of the appeal of the Dutch social housing associations, declared receivable last year. A revision of the Almunia Package is scheduled for 2017. It is likely that this timeframe would not allow the Commission to finalise the legislative procedure by the end of its term. For this reason, IUT is looking for allies to speed up the process.⁷

⁶ Full text available at:
<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=P-2015-002640&language=EN>

⁷ See the **Resolution for social housing in Europe**:
<http://www.iut.nu/EU/2014/Update%20Resolution%20Social%20Housing%20Jan%202014.pdf>

The Energy Union package: revision of legislation expected by 2016

The European Commission, backed up by the Council, presented its roadmap for the energy policy in the communication on the energy union package.⁸

In the field of smart technologies, the Commission will continue to push for standardisation and support the national roll-out of smart meters, while taking measures to ensure privacy protection and cyber-security.

It will seek the phasing-out of regulated prices through increasing competition in the energy markets. To protect vulnerable consumers, the Commission will ask Member States to put in place policy mechanisms preferably through their general welfare system or through schemes such as a solidarity tariff or discounts on energy bills. At the same time, «Member States will be encouraged to give energy efficiency primary consideration in their policies». District heating and cooling will be addressed in a strategy.

The Commission will pay special attention to those sectors with a huge energy efficiency potential, in particular the transport and buildings sector. For this purpose, it will support ways to simplify access to existing financing, develop new financing schemes and support in terms of technical assistance. «The European Fund for Strategic Investments provides an opportunity to leverage major investments in renovating buildings».

In 2015 and 2016 the Commission will review the **energy efficiency legislation** and will propose revisions, where needed, to underpin the target of reaching at least **27% energy savings by 2030**.

As part of the Horizon 2020 research program, the IUT Brussels team is working to build a European consortium which will work on the installation of smart meters in residential buildings. The partnership aims at improving the energy behaviour of tenants, having in mind the need for privacy protection. A key partner in the consortium is UNIAT, Italian tenants association with a strong interest in energy and environmental issues.

⁸ Full text available at: http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/energy-union/docs/energyunion_en.pdf

EFSI regulation: pushing for inclusion of social housing

The European Parliament is discussing the regulation of the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI). The Commission announced that social housing will be one of the key priority areas of the Fund, but this is actually not reflected in the Commission's text. The IUT asked several MEPs to include social housing in the regulation. Neena Gill MEP,⁹ member of the Housing Reference Group, tabled some amendments aiming to finance «energy efficiency improvements in housing» and «social infrastructures projects including social housing and public buildings». The text will be voted by the Committee on Budget in the coming days. Vote in Plenary is scheduled for next June.

ECHR judgement on right to housing against France

April 9th, the European Court of Human Rights issued a judgement against French public authorities, which did not re-house a citizen who lived in unhealthy social housing.¹⁰



The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg

CNL had already criticised the non-enforceability of the right to housing (*DALO*) in France. This judgement may have important consequences on national housing policies.

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⁹ More information on Neena Gill MEP at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/4533/NEENA_GILL_home.html

¹⁰ More information available at: [http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng-press/pages/search.aspx?i=003-5057997-6221383#{"itemid":\["003-5057997-6221383"\]}](http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/sites/eng-press/pages/search.aspx?i=003-5057997-6221383#{)