



International Union of Tenants

Association Internationale des Locataires

www.iut.nu

Press release

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Launch of a "Written Declaration" in the European Parliament "EU Commission, keep your hands off our social housing systems"

Brussels, November 11, 2010

"We have to protect our national social housing systems. With a written declaration in the European Parliament the MEPs ask the Commission to keep their hands off our national rules. The decision in the "Dutch case" on state aid for housing corporations is a violation of the principle of subsidiarity" says Barbara Steenbergen, head of the Brussels EU office of the International Union of Tenants (IUT).

Today 5 MEPs launched a written declaration in the European Parliament. 369 MEPs have to sign the declaration to reach a majority for it. Background is the decision in the "Dutch case" on state aid for housing corporations in The Netherlands dated December 2009. The former EU Commissioner Neelie Kroes decided that social housing should only be open for "socially disadvantaged groups". The new Dutch income limit for access to social housing is therefore lowered to 33.000 Euro gross per household and year.

It is a mystery why the Dutch government did not fight this decision. Housing Minister Piet Hein Donner is not willing to pick up the case again and negotiate higher income limits for the Dutch Tenants. At the end of October this year, a motion from the Dutch Parliament did not acquire the necessary majority because the fractions of CDA (Christian democrats) and PVV (extreme right) did not vote for it. This means that the new legislation has to be set in force in the Netherlands from January 2011 on.

"This was a serious political reverse in the Dutch case. The Dutch government capitulated- although there was room for negotiations with the EU commission" says Steenbergen. The ones who suffer are the tenants in the Netherlands. 650.000 people will be excluded from access to affordable social housing. A dangerous situation, given the fact the the housing costs in the Netherlands are the highest of all European countries. These middle income groups will be at serious risk for poverty.

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“We are very happy that the 5 MEPs are supporting our struggle for affordable housing in the European Parliament. With the majority of the European Parliament we would be able to pick up the debate with the EU commission again. It is a political must to protect the national social housing systems which are not limited to the poorest of the poor. We hope that the discussion in Brussels will lead to a new debate in the Netherlands too. In the Dutch case the jury is still out,” says Steenbergen.

De International Union of Tenants (IUT) is the head organisation of 58 tenants unions in 44 countries worldwide. At their congress in Prague, October 2010, 27 attending tenant organisations signed a written declaration to the EU COM and the Dutch government too (see attachment).

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