



International Union of Tenants

In Consultative Status with UN Economic and Social Council

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Zagreb Recommendations

To the EU Housing Ministers meeting in Padua November 27-28, 2003

Social inclusion in transition countries

The IUT has during the last ten years engaged itself in the development of the housing sector in east and central Europe, countries in transition. Market adjustment and the process of privatisation have been rapid and not always in-line with west European standards or legal frameworks. The formulation of new laws and regulations often lack behind. The effects of privatisation of multifamily housing and restitution have caused unsafeness, and in many cases despair, among the tenants. About 150 million people will join the EU in the next following ten years. Millions of them are presently having serious housing problems.

This process has had grave effects on especially the elderly, with often a low state pension to live on and little or no means to pay tripled rents or to fight long drawn-out legal processes. They feel excluded and very alone.

Privatisation and skyrocketing rents have also led to the situation where young couples are forced to stay with their parents, as there is no, or very little, affordable housing available. This has caused the age for marriage and childbirth to raise considerably. The age-pyramid is showing a growing number of elderly, who will need support, medical and financial, in the future.

There is a lot of money involved in housing. Even though governments in central and east Europe say that they are developing their housing strategies in order to protect the sitting tenants, the situation has in many cities become alarming. There are too many unscrupulous businesspeople and lawyers, and too many badly paid civil servants in the town halls, which makes it possible for dubious takeovers of flats and houses.

Tenants are being harassed and threatened by the new landlords, rents are being raised dramatically and when tenants have been forced to move out they have been allocated to much less comfortable flats than they have been entitled to.

Housing rights are included in many documents signed by the EU member states. Social inclusion, when it comes to housing, is threatened in many of the future EU member states, and the elderly is a particularly vulnerable group with very small means to claim their rights in this "new world".

Also, frequent reports say that minority groups such as the Romanies, find it very difficult to find housing nowadays. With very little state or municipal housing left, 1-4 percent, in many east European cities, there is no possibility for the authorities to allocate housing to these groups.

Segregation through inconsiderate and unsuccessful housing policies is a rapid growing problem in east European cities.

The IUT would like to, with regard to the situation in the accession countries:

- see established, where there are no such, a Housing Ombudsman,.
- in countries and cities where there are already such an Ombudsman, strengthen the role and authority of this person,
- through capacity building and information on available EU-funding and in accordance with standards in the present EU states, strengthen the importance and role of NGO:s such as tenant associations and their influence in the accession EU states. Also to provide the necessary opportunities for NGO:s to have full access to all EU institutions.
- have the EU Housing Ministers to further study the, negative and positive, effects of privatisation and restitution related to social inclusion. What future effects will a housing market with almost no public / social housing have on social inclusion and exclusion?
- make funding possible from the Structural Funds for projects in the field of housing; renovation, construction and rehabilitation for the most excluded – to avoid further social segregation.

Signed in Zagreb, Croatia

October 6, 2003

World Habitat Day / International Tenants' Day

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