



March 2014



Responsible Housing

European Responsible Housing Initiative (ERHIN) - Draft Joint Declaration and Code of Conduct

Hard but constructive negotiations between tenants associations and key representatives of the housing sector were held during the second meeting of the **ERHIN project**.

The outlines of a Joint Declaration and the Code of Conduct were outlined in a six-hour session, hosted by the *Hanse-Office* (Representation of Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein to the EU) on February 12 in Brussels.

While the **Joint Declaration** is a political commitment to CSR by different housing stakeholders (e.g. RICS, Solidar, COFACE, EIB, CEEP), the **Code of Conduct** is a set of business practices to which the signatories (housing companies) commit to.

The main claims of tenants associations were: guaranteed cost savings after energy refurbishment; institutionalized tenants

involvement; transparent allocation process for social housing and promotion of social mix; upgrading the living environment; reinvestment of profits in construction and renovation of the housing stock.

Negotiations on the two documents are still ongoing. The final round will be held on May 7th, where parties' signatures will be collected.

Furthermore, the project partners (CECODHAS, DELPHIS and IUT) have set up an **Awards Committee** that will select the best CSR practices and promote their replication. Selected practices will be rewarded by the ERHIN Jury on the occasion of the **International Tenants Day**, which will be held in Brussels on October 6 this year.

The ERHIN project was presented in front of an international audience for the first time at the UN Conference "The future of social housing", on February 4, in Geneva.¹

Mayors of European Cities present the "Resolution for social housing in Europe"

President **Barroso** and Commissioner **Hahn** met the mayors of European capitals in a summit held on February 17, in Brussels. The meeting was organised by the European Commission, just before the "**Cities of Tomorrow**" summit, where the question of the opportunity and content of an EU urban agenda was raised and discussed by different stakeholders. Main theme of the forum was how cities can be better heard and linked to each other in times

¹<http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=33997>

of economic crisis and demographic change. «Social housing plays a major role in our cities», Dr **Michael Häupl** (Mayor of Vienna) said during the press conference with the Mayors of Bratislava, Ljubljana, Nantes and Rome, where **Barbara Steenbergen** (Head of IUT liaison office to the EU) was invited as housing expert.



Dr **Michael Häupl** (Mayor of Vienna)

According to **EU competition** rules, state aid to social housing providers is restricted to a clearly defined target group of disadvantaged citizens. This legal basis has led to several complaints against social housing systems in Sweden, the Netherlands and – more recently – France. The consequences were severe: in Sweden, governments had to stop all state aid to public housing sector (aids are to the individual tenant) while in the Netherlands they had to redefine the allocation criteria, with the result that 650000 households basically lost their right to housing assistance. In France, private landlords lodged two complaints with the aim of lowering income thresholds for social housing.

Last year Dr Häupl launched the initiative «**to maintain and develop a sustainable social housing in Europe**». The signatories completely agree with IUT's political line on the issue. The resolution has been signed by **30 European city mayors**, with different party affiliation.

«With this common statement at EU level, our aim is to defend the European social model. We are against those neoliberal approaches that favour only the profits. We stand for a social Europe, which includes also decent and affordable housing for all», Dr Häupl said.

In addition to Vienna, the Mayors of capital cities like Amsterdam, Berlin, Copenhagen, Dublin, Lisbon, Paris, Prague, Rome and Zagreb have called for the **preservation of social housing in Europe**. The European Commission is invited to «leave the definition of the target group of social housing to regional and local authorities», in line with the EU subsidiarity principle. « Here, we comply with important stakeholders such as CECODHAS Housing Europe, the federation of public, cooperative and social housing, and IUT, the International Union of Tenants (IUT) ». ²

In addition, the Social Democratic Party of Vienna launched an **online petition** to support the initiative of the mayors. The citizens of Vienna are supposed to sign the petition. ³

News in brief

After the call of the EU housing ministers meeting held in December, the **European Parliament** has adopted the resolution on an “**EU homelessness strategy**” on January 16th. The MEPs recognized that there is an increasing demand for affordable housing and therefore Member States are asked to develop social and affordable housing in order to prevent social exclusion and homelessness. Furthermore, «**in cooperation with tenants' organisations**, they should implement effective prevention policies to reduce the rate of evictions». ⁴

On March 13 the EP has adopted an INI report on “**Employment and social aspects of the role and operations of the Troika**”. Art 78 calls Member States and local authorities to «introduce **neutral housing policies** that favour social and affordable housing, tackle the issue of housing vacancy and implement effective prevention policies to reduce the number of evictions». ⁵

²<http://www.iut.nu/EU/2014/Aktuell%20Resolution%20Ozialer%20Wohnbau%20Jan%202014.pdf>

³<http://resolution.spw.at/>

⁴<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubR ef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2014-0043+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>

⁵<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubR ef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2014-0240+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>

Davide Lanzillotti (IUT policy officer) participated in the Committee of the Regions' consultation on energy poverty. He presented IUT's views and inputs to the new report of Mr Illedits **"Affordable Energy for All"**.⁶ A definition of the problem should be agreed if Member States wants to address it at EU level. Regarding the criteria for defining vulnerable energy consumers, Mr Lanzillotti pointed out that Income level is one, but not the only criteria. Other criteria may include: quality of the housing stock, energy equipment and its efficiency, tenancy status, final energy prices, companies' debt policies, bill transparency and accessibility, and literacy. He also added that energy poverty cannot be considered an issue for social policy only. Energy legislation should also be part of the solution, through measures such as banning energy disconnection during winter times, provider of last resort, targeted social tariffs, and incentives for energy efficiency measures.

Barbara Steenbergen (Head of IUT Liaison Office to the EU) took part in the **European Forum Alpbach**,⁷ held in Vienna on March 6-7. For many years, the Austrian housing system has worked very well, and might be considered as the best performing one at EU level in terms of social housing provision and tenure security. However, as in other EU countries, also in Austria the housing sector is facing new challenges (i.e. economic, social and demographic). 60 invited participants (housing practitioners, financial experts, architects, sociologists, urban planning professionals and politicians) discussed along the Chatham House Rules the main pillars for a progressive future housing policy in Austria. Mrs Steenbergen presented the emerging needs of tenants and key actions for more affordable housing to implement.

The outcome of the Alpbach Forum workshop will be presented to the Austrian government.

⁶<https://toad.cor.europa.eu/AgendaDocuments.aspx?pmi=ha5jDW%2bOWSH1a9yFWFzBHfWszLqg4qJP6AGYeqmHsrM%3d&ViewDoc=true>

⁷<http://www.alpbach.org/en/unterveranstaltung/rethink-housing-policy/>

The EU Court of Justice (EUCJ) ruled on appeal against a General Court (GC) ruling that had dismissed as inadmissible **actions by two Dutch housing corporations against the Commission state aid decision of December 2009 regarding Dutch social housing**. The EUCJ set aside the judgement of GC and sent the case back to the GC to decide on the substance of the appeals.⁸

On May 2014 EU citizens will vote for the **elections of the European Parliament**.⁹ This is a great chance to have our say and influence the work of future Members of the European Parliament. Therefore, the International Union of Tenants will present its **"milestones"** to the Candidates before the electoral campaign. The main political parties have published their political manifesto for the coming elections. Within its programme for 2014-2019,¹⁰ the **Party of European Socialists (PES)**, second biggest force in the EP, considers housing – and social housing in particular – a milestone of our societies and, therefore, a political priority for the years to come.



EP campaign logo for the forthcoming elections

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⁸<http://curia.europa.eu/juris/liste.jsf?language=en&jur=C,T,F&num=C-132/12%20P&td=ALL>

<http://curia.europa.eu/juris/liste.jsf?language=en&jur=C,T,F&num=C-133/12%20P&td=ALL>

⁹ <http://europedecides.eu/european-parliament/#tab-candidate-lists>

¹⁰ http://www.pes.eu/sites/www.pes.org/files/pes_manifesto_-_adopted_by_the_pes_election_congress_en.pdf