

IUT Strategy on EU Issues

1. The Challenges

1.1 Social inclusion and urban renewal

One of the main topics of the social debate in EU is how social inclusion should be enhanced. The urban sprawl and relocation of the population to large metropolitan areas have, in combination with widespread unemployment and increased income gaps, lead to ghettoisation and increased social tension that at times follows ethnic lines. Social inclusion has become the umbrella under which a number of social issues compete for attention. As segregation quite clearly has a spatial dimension and thus is related to housing it should be quite easy to get housing recognized as one of the key elements to enhance social inclusion.

The main argument of IUT and its member organizations in propagating the tenants cause in the EU should be social inclusion. The IUT shall put forward the right to decent, affordable and sustainable housing in EU decision documents relating to urban renewal and social inclusion.

1.2 The Cases

At present rent setting system and state aid (S), the issue of the mission of social housing companies (NL), financing of social housing (FR) have been or are at present cases treated by the European Commission. The cases concern inner market rules on competition and state aid and could or can have wide implications for the functioning of the Member States' systems for provision of housing.

By coordinating contacts with parliamentarians and governments the national organizations can assist each other in putting pressure on the European Commission officials.

1.3 Services of General Interest

The main issue ahead is whether the SGI issue should be treated in a frame directive or in sector directives. The European trade unions want a frame directive fearing that the European Court of Justice otherwise will have ample possibilities to interpret the directive. The European Commission and the liberal/conservative majority in the European Parliament want sector directives with more narrow scopes. The influential French social housing organization L'Union Sociale Pour l'Habitat has stated that it wants a sector directive on

social housing. CECODHAS will put forward a position paper; the European Socialist Party pushes for a regulation and CEEP, European Centre of Enterprises with Public participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest has formulated a draft proposal. Steps towards a sector directive are taken by the Urban Housing Intergroup through initiatives in various committees. *The IUT should push for a broad definition of social housing in SGI-related decisions and documents and safeguarding other public housing undertakings from inner market rules.*

1.4 The Lisbon Agenda

The Lisbon Agenda is a development plan for the European Union. The main fields are economic, social, and environmental renewal and sustainability. A review of the strategy states that home ownership should be encouraged as it enables economic activity.

Rental housing should be put forward as a promoter of labour force mobility.

1.5 The Constitutional Treaty

During 2006 the debate on the Constitutional Treaty recommenced and it will probably increase during the coming years. One of the main issues will be what emphasis should be given to social issues. *The IUT shall put forward an inclusion of the right to housing in a future Constitutional Treaty as part of its emphasis on social issues.*

2 Influencing EU decisions

2.1 Organization

2.1.1 Why an IUT/ EU

As the Background Paper shows there is a number of issues affecting tenant housing in EU. There are 27 Member States in the European union with a population of together 500 million inhabitants. It goes without saying that it is difficult for a single national organization to have an impact on EU decisions. A first step is to coordinate the efforts in a network of national tenant organizations within the EU. The IUT therefore has taken the initiative to form such a network – IUT/EU.

The IUT/EU network coordinates the efforts of the national organizations in EU.

The IUT/EU network is responsible for carrying out IUT activities in EU.

2.1.2 Activity Plan

An Activity Plan based on the IUT Strategy on EU Issues should be presented to the IUT Board of Directors. The plan should contain a timetable for activities, person in charge of planning and conducting the activity, message, target group and budget. The plan should more precisely show how IUT activities in the EU should be organized and coordinated and how the IUT/EU organisations can increase their capacity in influencing EU decisions.

The IUT/EU network is responsible for the implementation of the Activity Plan.

The IUT/EU is to present the Activity Plan to the IUT Board of Directors in September 2007.

2.1.3 Basic knowledge of decision making in EU

As the decision process in EU is slow and complicated, influencing in the EU is a slow and complicated process with many stations. It is however essential to try to influence as early in the process as possible before decision makers and other actors have committed themselves in one or the other way.

The member organizations of the IUT/EU inform themselves on how decisions are made in the EU and on how to influence EU decisions.

2.1.4 Monitoring EU

Decision making in EU is at times an obscure process. Initiatives come from the Commission, but can also come from the committees of the European Parliament or the Council of Ministers. The obscurity and the diversity of process of the process makes close monitoring of the decision making machinery paramount.

The IUT/EU establishes an office with a representative in Brussels with the purpose of monitoring and lobbying EU decisions.

2.2 Target groups

2.2.1 Networks

To increase its influence the IUT/EU network needs to coordinate its efforts with other networks with the same or similar interests in a more social EU such as CECODHAS, (the social landlords organization), FEANTSA (an organization fighting homelessness), Social Platform (an alliance of representative European federations and networks of non-governmental organisations active in the social sector), ETUC (European trade Union Council) and others. The purpose is to act jointly with these networks on specific decisions and initiatives.

The IUT/EU network establishes contact and cooperation with the relevant networks, alliances and councils working towards EU.

2.2.2 Member States Ministers

Depending on the political situation in each Member State the national organizations of EU/IUT have access to their national governments and thus to members of the the Council of Ministers. Decisions concerning one Member State can have effects also on other Member States and this might be sufficient for the responsible minister to act. Decisions concerning the European Union as a whole are naturally discussed in the Council of Ministers.

The IUT/EU network maps the Member States ministers with an interest in housing.

2.2.3 Commissioners

Depending on the political situation in each Member State the national organizations of EU/IUT have access to a Commissioner. Decisions in the Commission Collège are collective and a Commissioner can influence decisions in all matters.

The IUT/EU network maps the Commissioners with an interest in housing.

2.2.4 EP Party Groups

The Party Groups in the European Parliament are the main negotiating bodies within the European Parliament before decisions in the Parliament. No Member can be forced to vote in a particular way.

The IUT/EU network establishes contact with the relevant EP Party Groups and informs them on the IUT position on EU issues where housing is concerned.

2.2.5 EP Committees

Decisions in the European Parliament are prepared by the 20 parliamentary committees that draw up, amend and adopt legislative proposals and own-initiative reports. They consider Commission and Council proposals and, where necessary, draw up reports to be presented to the plenary assembly. The committees of relevance to housing are primarily EMPL, Employment and Social Affairs and REGI, Regional Development.

The IUT/EU network establishes contact with the EMPL and REGI and informs them on the IUT position on EU issues where housing is concerned.

2.2.6 Parliamentarians

The MEPs or the Members of the European Parliament can influence every area of the day to day life of the European public: the environment, consumer protection and transport, as well as education, culture, health and housing. They do this in their own right through initiatives and through the decision making bodies within the Parliament through questions, motions for resolutions, reports and speeches in committees and in plenary sessions. With the

help of MEPs the IUT/EU can promote voting on a specific issue through a vote recommendation.

The IUT/EU network maps MEPs with an interest in housing and informs them on the IUT position on EU issues where housing is concerned.