



December 2013

## Meeting with Martin Schulz

On September 19, **Barbara Steenbergen**, Head of IUT Brussels, had a meeting with the **Martin Schulz (President of the European Parliament)** to discuss the follow up of the Initiative report on “Social housing in the EU” as well as state aid questions. The meeting was fruitful; there is indeed a commitment on the part of the EP President to favour other EU initiatives in the field. Schulz announced that the theme “affordable housing” will play a role in the European Parliament elections May 22-25, 2014.

## CNL demonstrating in Lille

IUT Brussels joined the **CNL at the HLM-congress in Lille** on September 26, and participated in a street demonstration to ask the French government for more investments in affordable housing construction, as there is a big shortage in the supply. French President Hollande came with an ambitious housing programme during his electoral campaign, which is unfortunately far from being implemented. **CNL President Eddie Jacquemart** had exchanges with the French housing minister **Cécile Duflot** and the minister for urban affairs, **François Lamy**.

## IUT Congress Krakow

On October 25-27, the Brussels’ delegation contributed to the **IUT Congress in Krakow** through two main initiatives:

- The launch of the first “**EU guide for tenants unions**”, written by **Davide Lanzillotti**. The booklet aims to develop tenant’s understanding of EU policy making process and facilitate internal debate on EU policies. IUT Brussels offered to give workshops for the staff of national tenants unions.
- The presentation of the draft “**Tenants’ milestones for the elections of the European Parliament**”.<sup>1</sup> IUT members have been asked to comment on the document, which is aimed to influence the work of future Members of the EP.



IUT members in Krakow

## New allies

**György Sümeghy** (Habitat for Humanity, advocacy manager responsible for Europe, Middle East and Africa) visited the IUT Brussels office on October 30. He presented the work of

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.iut.nu/EU/2013/TenantMilestones2014.pdf>

his organisation and discussed possible joint actions with IUT at EU level. Habitat is a foundation established in the 70s with the aim to influence housing policies in favour of the poor. Its activities are not limited to advocacy, as the organisation is also involved in housing microfinance.

### **Familiar partners**

Also this year, IUT participated in the **Freja Forum** (November 4, in Brussels). The audience mainly consisted of civic associations coming from **EU candidate countries**, e.g. Macedonia, Albania and Serbia. Common trends are: high rates of homeownership, lacking security of tenure, poor energy-efficiency, neglected maintenance, property restitution issues (sitting tenants) and public policies that do not stimulate rental housing supply. **Jorgen Jensen (LLO)** and **Barbara Steenbergen (IUT Brussels)** presented the IUT cornerstones for good rental policies. The audience was very interested in the IUT advocacy campaign for tenure neutrality, i.e. national and local policies (finance, taxation) that create a balance between different housing tenures with the aim of matching different needs- for a real consumer choice between renting and owning.

### **Responsible Housing –on the way to a joint charter with housing providers**

On November 7, the IUT chaired the first **Stakeholder Forum’s meeting of the ERHIN project**. The **European Responsible Housing Initiative** is an EU-funded project that aims to:

- create a common definition of “responsible housing” with the involvement of different stakeholders;
- agree on CSR Joint Declaration and Charter in order to promote “responsible housing” across the EU;
- identify best practices in the sector and reward most responsible housing providers.

The meeting was attended by different stakeholders representing tenants and consumers, providers, investment banks, civil society, public employer organisations and

professionals in the housing sector. **Heike Zuhse (DMB)**, **Eddie Jacquemart (CNL)** and **Ronald Paping (NW)** presented the view of tenants associations. *«It is necessary that tenants are included in the board of housing associations and are given substantial powers»*, **Zuhse** said. *«Affordability, quality, proximity to services and working places are key elements for a responsible housing policy»*, **Jacquemart** added. **Paping** pointed out that a problem of non-compliance with CSR values and principles mainly exists in the private rental market. *«Responsible housing should mean minimum standards for all operators in the rental housing market»*, he said. Tenants’ view is very relevant to the project, as the main aim of “responsible housing” is to meet inhabitants’ expectations through their involvement in business processes. The next meeting of the Forum will be held on February 12.



ERHIN Stakeholder Forum, Vienna-House, Brussels

### **Finally: increase of income limits in the Netherlands**

On November 14, **Mr Paping (NW)** and **Mrs Steenbergen (IUT)** had a background meeting with **PvdA**, the Dutch labour party. They launched a motion for a review of the income ceiling for social housing allocation. In the Netherlands many people are excluded from the rental market, because they are considered “to earn too much” to be eligible for social housing, but at the same time they cannot afford buying a home or renting at market rates.

On November 26, the ***Tweede Kamer*** (Dutch Parliament) has voted in favour of an **increased income ceiling for social housing**. The current limit of EUR 34.229, established five years ago following a controversial decision of the European Commission, will move to EUR 38.000. There are chances that such limit will be further increased up to EUR 43.000.

According to the motion adopted by the *Tweede Kamer*, housing associations will be allowed to allocate 20% of the available stock to households with an income between EUR 34.229 and 38.000 (in 2012 prices). These households will be eligible for dwellings whose rent varies between EUR 536 and 681. Less expensive dwellings will be available for lower income households only. «This is fair because low income tenants struggle to pay more than EUR 550» Paping said.

Woonbond and IUT have been advocating for five years in order to increase the income limit.<sup>2</sup>

### **Structural funds for housing refurbishment and urban development**

The European Parliament has voted in favour of the **New Cohesion policy package** (2014-2020) on November 20. The new structural funds dedicate substantial amounts for the thematic objective “low carbon economy”, which includes the energy refurbishment of housing stock. Moreover, **5% of ERDF** will be dedicated to Sustainable urban development.

### **Ada Colau visiting IUT in Brussels: 2 days of advocacy towards the EU institutions**

The housing situation in Spain is one of the worst all over Europe: 500.000 people have been evicted because they could not pay their mortgages anymore. Even if the banks took their homes, they have to go on paying the debt, a debt for life.

On December 5, the International Union of Tenants (IUT), the Deutscher Mieterbund Nordrhein-Westfalen (DMB NRW) and the

Spanish **Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca** (PAH) headed by Mrs Ada Colau,<sup>3</sup> held a press conference in Brussels about housing policy in Europe, with a special focus on the Spanish situation. It was the occasion to highlight the demands and claims of the NGOs representing the inhabitants.



Press conference with PAH, 5 December 2013

Moreover, Ada Colau and the representatives from DMB and IUT had meetings with several MEPs to discuss legislative initiatives for a reform of the Spanish law of obligations, severely violating the rights of Spanish consumers. Last but not least PAH and the tenants union of Cologne had exchanges about a possible cooperation.



Meeting with Evelyn Regner (MEP) at the European Parliament, Brussels

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.woonbond.nl/nieuws/3333>;  
[http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/22089274/ Sociale\\_huurgrens\\_omhoog\\_.html](http://www.telegraaf.nl/binnenland/22089274/ Sociale_huurgrens_omhoog_.html)

<sup>3</sup> [http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ada\\_Colau](http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ada_Colau)



## IUT at the 19<sup>th</sup> meeting of EU housing ministers

On December 10, IUT President Sven Bergenstråhle gave a presentation during the **meeting of the EU Housing Ministers**. The main messages conveyed were the need for more tenure neutrality in national housing policies and a larger rental housing sector (at least 1/3 of the overall sector). The audience was very interested in the positive correlation between the size of rental market and GDP per capita. The Ministers produced a communique where they supported new financing methods and emphasised the role of the **European Investment Bank** to meet the growing need for affordable housing in Europe.<sup>4</sup>



Sven Bergenstråhle, IUT President, at EU housing ministers meeting 2013

## Time to stop a European wave of evictions- stress test of the social cohesion in the EU

Finally, on December 18, IUT and CECODHAS Housing Europe issued a joint press release addressing the increasing problem of evictions in the EU, and suggesting an alternative approach to the emergency situation.<sup>5</sup>

Greece, together with Spain and Ireland, are the EU countries with the largest number of evictions- mainly caused by “homeownership-

only” policies and the consequences of austerity measures.

At the eve of the Greek Presidency of the European Union in 2014, one of the main issues will be to establish legal protection for people threatened by evictions.

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### About IUT

*Since its foundation in 1926, IUT has been dedicated at safeguarding tenant’s rights, as well as promoting construction and access to affordable rental housing. IUT believes that every well-functioning society is better off with a mix of rentals and ownership housing.*

*IUT promotes secure tenure, tenant’s rights and residential democracy.*

*Headquarter of IUT is in Stockholm, Sweden. From IUT’s office in Brussels, Belgium, we run our affairs with the European Union.*

*IUT is a membership based organisation, with 62 members in 43 countries (2013) around the world.*

Visit our website: [www.iut.nu](http://www.iut.nu)

IUT on Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/IUT.International.Union.of.Tenants](https://www.facebook.com/IUT.International.Union.of.Tenants)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.doukeridis.be/blog/2013/12/11/le-logement-axe-essentiel-pour-sortir-de-la-crise/>

More information on [www.iut.nu](http://www.iut.nu)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.housingeurope.eu/news/3070>