



Housing Europe: The Social and Green Way

For a Europe that provides access to decent and affordable housing for all in communities which are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable and where all are enabled to reach their full potential,

The European Union should in the future:

- ✚ Invest in social innovation; local social capital and social infrastructure by promoting all forms of enterprises and local initiatives
- ✚ Lead the green industrial revolution by promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy in housing
- ✚ Commit to ensuring all citizens have access to a decent and affordable home and a life in dignity by actively promoting policies to implement it.

CECODHAS
MANIFESTO 2009

EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT
ELECTIONS

Housing Europe: the Social and Green Way

CECODHAS, the European Liaison Committee for Social Housing, provides through its members more than 22 millions homes across Europe.

To the not-for-profit providers of affordable homes and sustainable neighbourhoods within CECODHAS, EU elections are an opportunity to **improve people's life chances and quality of life through better living conditions.**

In answering, the current **financial and economic crisis** the European Commission have proposed to invest in affordable and green housing. Housing is a key sector of the economy and ensuring a stable local housing market but also socially and environmentally sustainable neighbourhoods constitute the offer of social housing providers (including public, non-for profit and cooperative housing). In addition to supporting economic recovery, our vision proposes an answer to the tremendous **challenge of climate change** (that requires both mitigation and adaptation efforts from housing providers) and the **demographic evolutions** (such as the ageing of the population) which will have serious consequences on both the supply and the demand of housing in the next decade.

Our manifesto wish to show the necessity for the future Members of the European Parliament to shape "**social housing friendly**" policies.

Right to decent and affordable housing should not be a hypothetical right, but implemented for all. With the following demands, we are proposing you help us make better places to live in for all, in other words, communities which are economically, socially and environmentally sustainable



David Orr
CECODHAS President

2004-2009 - WHAT HAPPENED TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS?

The EU has produced more "social housing friendly" policies because of:

- The engagement and growing importance of the Urban-housing Inter Group of the European Parliament
- The first ever initiative report of the European Parliament on Housing issues (Andria report)
- The lobbying of the new member States for the eligibility of housing expenditure in the EU-12
- The recognition of the positive potential of social housing in increasing energy efficiency of its stock by allowing the use structural Funds

But also because of:

- Meeting the climate change challenge is one of the EU's top priorities for the coming years; housing is one of the main sectors where a contribution to potential reduction of energy use can be made.
- The current and coming demographic evolutions (ageing population, increasing ethnic diversity, persistent socio-economic inequalities)
- The major financial and now economic crisis that is hitting a growing part of the population; investment in the social housing sector is seen as a positive contra-cyclical policy to support economic activities.

For all of these reasons, housing conditions are increasingly seen as a persistent challenge for the EU and support to social housing as part of the solution. Nevertheless, EU policies in many cases still consider housing and social housing as a problem.

EU policies are still in many cases "social housing unfriendly" because:

- The EU is focussing on growth and jobs and does not invest in social inclusion and social cohesion at the same scale
- There is no positive framework for social services, which results in damaging legal uncertainty for local and social service providers
- The various forms of entrepreneurship are not taken into account in the EU rules
- At the EU level, social housing is defined too restrictively for many EU Member States, leaving for example no possibility to have integrated actions in the field of housing
- Housing is still considered as a "normal good" when it also constitute a "basic right" and when it can not move

EU policies have today a more difficult housing context to deal with than five years ago

Indeed during this period housing affordability, quality and availability have barely improved (figures). According to the *Survey on perceptions of quality of life in 75 European cities*, "only 27% of the respondents agree that it is easy to find good housing at a reasonable price"¹. The mortgage crisis will create more difficulties not only for households facing increasing mortgage payments but also for housing organizations which were accustomed to work with commercial banks and are now confronted with the tightening of credit resources needed for their activities. A growing number of households are being hit by fuel poverty. Economic forecasts for the next two year are negative: the OECD expects the number of unemployed to rise by 8 million in its Member States between now and 2010. This means that more people will be looking for affordable housing.

2009-2014 – FIVE YEARS TO MAKE THE REAL DIFFERENCE

The European Parliament will be in strong position to make the difference for people's housing and living conditions – MEPs should use this opportunity!

We, non-for profit, public and co-operatives housing providers, have a vision of a European Union where access to decent and affordable housing is provided for all in communities which are socially, economically and environmentally sustainable and where all are enabled to reach their full potential.

We think that this vision is shared by many people, above all because it corresponds to the legitimate expectations of our fellow citizens.

CECODHAS urges the national and European political parties as well as the candidates and future MEPs to fight for:

An "all inclusive" European society

One of the objectives of the future EU institutions should be to reinforce the inclusion of all citizens. European citizens do not only expect "the EU to be closer", they above all expect the EU to be a guarantee of a better life (as shown in many Euro barometers survey). In the field of housing, including people means ensuring affordability, quality and availability for all, regardless of their age, ethnic origin, social and physical disabilities. This can be achieved through different but complementary ways and future MEPs should be strong drivers regarding this challenge.

For this "all inclusive" European society to become a reality, we need future MEPs to push for:

1. The right to housing to be integrated as a core pillar of social inclusion policies (to help Member States implement this basic right by sharing experiences)
2. An inter-institutional Declaration commitment to end poverty and exclusion by 2020 with clear housing exclusion reduction targets? This implies a reduction of poverty by half during the EP mandate (agreed millennium goals at UN which should had been reached in 2000)
3. Better use of EU research funding on issues social innovation like ageing, family evolution, integration of migrants to help decision makers to improve their policies and practitioners to adapt their activities
4. Better use of the European Social Funds to train professionals but as well to develop innovative approaches (in line with the former EQUAL programme)
5. An EU initiative to identify policy options to tackle the consequences of mortgage crisis and of housing speculation on affordability and on the overall economic growth

A European impulse for sustainable housing

In 2009, the fight against climate change will come at a crucial point since world leaders will be deciding over the future of the Kyoto protocol and the EU will have to keep the momentum to further implement its climate change and energy strategy. Energy efficiency in housing has been already identified as a key element of this strategy (not least because more than 20% of the reduction of CO2 emissions in the EU can be achieved by the housing sector). But a great challenge lies also in the shifting of housing demand and use towards more sustainability.

To cope with those challenges, we need the future MEPs to push for:

1. A far-reaching EU campaign to trigger a shift in housing consumption patterns and to promote positive energy housing and ecological urban development
2. Initiatives that will promote the spread within the housing sector of new technologies and building materials which use less energy (aiming at creating energy-positive homes), strengthen research programmes to increase energy efficiency, including in existing housing, provide effective follow-up to pilot projects in the social housing sector
3. Initiatives for training workforce in new housing refurbishment/construction techniques
4. A European Action Plan on the fight against fuel poverty, accompanying the measures taken within EU energy policy
5. Greening of the Energy liberalisation package (obligation for energy providers to support energy efficiency projects; facilitation of renewable small units production, energy advice to consumers...)
6. A 0% VAT rate for investments in existing residential dwellings to improve their energy efficiency
7. Structural funds 2007-2013 to be effectively used in EU 12 and EU 15 for energy efficiency in housing
8. The revenues of the EU Emission Trading Scheme to be used to promote energy efficiency and renewable energy in existing housing stock

Better places to live

It is impossible to separate individuals from the places and communities they live in. Improving people life chances can only be realised through actions on their living conditions and their communities. This means not only actions on the physical environment but also on the services that are provided. This idea is at the core of the integrated approach to sustainable urban development; but it is also true for rural areas. Although EU policies have promoted this approach, they often disregard the importance of combining actions on socio-economic infrastructure (such as housing) and actions on services provided to the persons (such as housing-related services). 2009 will also mark the start of discussion on the objective of territorial cohesion at EU level. While housing is a crucial element for the attractiveness of an area, it is also an instrument which limits territorial imbalances, it is not usually taken into account in current debates.

To correct this, we need the future MEPs to push for

1. The future cohesion policy to develop a "Neighbourhood" fund merging the different Structural Funds with the aim of developing economically, socially and environmentally deprived areas
2. an EU exchange programme for local decision-makers in neighbourhoods development (URBACT and follow-up and extension of Erasmus) to improve common knowledge and practices on integrated approaches
3. a systematic analysis of the impact of EU policies on European territories as well as use of qualitative and quantitative housing indicators within this analysis
4. a housing dimension in the practical and inclusive reference framework for the implementation of EU's sustainable urban development goals proposed by the Member States
5. The recognition of the necessity to provide access to social services and services of general interest (such as social housing) as integrated part of territorial cohesion policies

Positive EU regulatory framework for social actors

Over the past 5 years, Community litigation in connection with social housing has been developing and legal uncertainty is increasing for the competent public authorities, the housing companies and the benefiting households. For instance, the European Union is now capable of redefining the perimeter of the service of general interest of social housing. This is clearly damaging the capacity of social housing actors but also other social actors to adapt to changing social demand (that often require to act in a complex and integrated way which are usually not covered by EU rules), this also poses a problem for the actual implementation of the right of housing and the requirements of social mix and diversity. More generally, the EU is too often blind to the social and local importance of alternative forms of entrepreneurship which are not-for-profit and provide high quality services for the communities.

To change this, we need the future MEPs to push for:

1. The different EU policies to implement the values and principles anchored in the protocol on Services of General Interest annexed to the Lisbon Treaty, once it is ratified by the Member States, so that local authorities can freely organise, finance and deliver the most appropriate services to the citizens
2. The European Commission to reinforce the compatibility of State aid for social housing in its revision of the 2005 decision
3. Recognition of the value and specificity of social enterprises and actors of social economy (regardless of their size) in the delivery of social services of general interest
4. The development of innovative financial instruments (such as micro-credit) to support the activities of social enterprises in their mission

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CECODHAS MISSION

CECODHAS is the European Committee for social housing, a network of national and regional social housing federations gathering public, voluntary and cooperatives housing organisations. Together the 45 members in 19 EU members States manage 22 millions dwellings. CECODHAS members work together:

- to reinforce the European Social model and take an active role in the definition of its future
- to protect fundamental rights and call for policies to ensure and reinforce social rights
- to promote integrated approaches to urban policies and sustainable development
- to fight for services of general interest of good quality accessible for all and for legal certainty for the providers