

14.03.2004

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**DRAFT Final Communiqué
of the
16th European Housing Ministers Meeting
held in Prague, the Czech Republic,
14th and 15th March, 2005**

CONSIDERING:

- that housing policy is a major responsibility of each individual Member State and that housing policy has therefore neither been an area of exclusive nor shared competence of the EU. The current discussions on the draft Constitution for Europe have not changed this view¹,
- that certain elements of EU-legislation and EU-programmes have affected and will affect housing very directly and significantly, as described in the documentation presented at the meeting,
- that housing contributes to fundamental areas of activities of the EU, as contained in the Lisbon Agenda of 2000 such as (a) coordinating economic policy, taxation and financial services, (b) consolidating the social dimension in an enlarged Union, and (c) ensuring sustainable development in construction, refurbishment and restructuring,
- that specifically regarding the URBAN Community Initiative, relevant EU-funds could so far only be used to improve very limited aspects of housing,
- that high-rise residential buildings in restructuring the relevant areas is particularly problematic in the new Central and Eastern EU Member States, as well as in Bulgaria and Romania, affecting the lives of some 40% of the urban population, as is described in the basic document on “Sustainable Refurbishment of High-Rise Residential Buildings and Restructuring of the Surrounding Areas” prepared for the meeting.

the Ministers CONCLUDED:

- that it is important to adopt a sustainability perspective when refurbishing high-rise residential buildings and restructuring their surroundings, and to take account of constructional, social and economic and eco-efficiency aspects,
- that emphasis should be given on integrated strategies involving housing management, maintenance employment, energy-saving measures, urban development and social policy approaches in the refurbishment of large, high-rise housing estates in the new EU-Member States and accession countries. In this context financially sound housing entities, in the rental, home ownership and cooperative sector, are of crucial importance,

¹ the quotation from the European Constitution (concerning “the Union recognizes ... the right existence ...”)

- that appropriate housing institutions will have to be improved or created within the new EU-Member States. Therefore, parallel social programs need to be included in the set of refurbishment measures in order to avoid social tensions (and economic losses) once the process has started,
- that rules governing the urban renewal programs should be devised in order to tailor such programmes to specific regional needs, especially in term of: (a) financial feasibility and (b) technical solutions implemented,
- that refurbishment is a major financial issue requiring significant investment, particularly in new member states and accession countries, that is primarily a domestic concern, which demands clear political choices and policies,
- that there was agreement that a broad range of financial options, including guarantee structures, should be explored as a basis for further debate,
- that some Ministers are of the opinion that EU-funds should be used for housing development, especially for co-financing the refurbishment of the housing stock, including high-rise residential buildings especially in the new EU Member States in Central and Eastern Europe. However, a number of other Ministers were not in favour of co-financing housing development by means of EU-funds. All Ministers were willing to explore the possibility of the use of EU-funds under the existing financial framework to benefit housing, in particular in relation to energy efficiency.
- that the Ministers from the Czech Republic and the Netherlands will send a letter, on behalf of the Ministers of 16th Housing Ministers Meeting, to the European Commission informing about this Final Communiqué with the view of explore the possibility of the use of EU-funds under the existing financial framework to benefit housing, in particular in relation to energy efficiency; the Commission will be requested to react at shortest possible notice; a copy of this letter will be sent to all Housing Ministers and to the European Parliament.
- that pilot projects should be initiated by the EU regarding energy saving modernization and complex refurbishment of residential buildings.
- that some EU member states proposed the option to set a reduced value added tax rate for housing.
- that the European Investment Bank (EIB) has substantial resources to help financing housing priorities in an integrated approach, and that EIB has taken the welcome initiative to investigate the possibilities for new financial options, including guarantee structures, and that they commit themselves to contribute to this exercise,
- that they took note with interest of the initiative to explore the feasibility of a European Housing Bank and look forward to discussing the outcome thereof by the first half of 2006,

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- that they welcomed the decision adopted in February 2004 by the European Commission to exempt social housing subsidies from the obligation of notification as a local service with no significant impact on trades in the internal market but with strong added value on the social cohesion of the EU,
- that thanks to the Czech Republic and Sweden the “Housing Statistics in the EU Countries 2004” has been prepared using a new approach stressing the internationally comparability of statistical data and containing also some basic strategic information concerning the role of governments,

and with regard to the future CONFIRM:

- that pilot projects and information exchange on best practices is essential. In this context, inter alia, actions in the field of neighbourhood solidarity were mentioned,
- that certain Member States expressed their willingness to contribute to facilitate the participation of trainees in tailor-made courses on “sustainable refurbishment of high-rise residential buildings and restructuring of the surrounding areas in Europe”,
- that Housing Demand Surveys and Housing Quality Surveys are needed (and might be possibly co-financed by the EU) in many countries in order to obtain reliable and where possible comparable data on the numbers and kinds of dwellings that should be built, demolished or renovated in the short- and mid-term housing process, especially on a local level,
- that the issue of problematic large housing estates should be considered for inclusion in the upcoming EU 7th Framework Programme on Research and Development,
- that future EU Housing Ministers meetings ought to explore the important links between housing policies and urban policies designed to improve infrastructure in cities.
- that EU Housing Ministers meetings ought to support activities to improve the financial and legal situation of new construction and refurbishment in Central and Eastern European (CEE) as well as South-Eastern European (SEE) countries,
- that a platform for information exchange should be considered in order to provide for the sharing of best practices on improving quality standards for existing housing stock,
- that the European Commission is requested to inform the Housing Ministers about the relevance housing of forthcoming EU-legislation proposals have in order to enable the Housing Ministers of the Member States to safeguard housing interests timely,
- that the Ministers may bring these conclusions to the attention of national and/or regional colleagues in Economic Affairs, of Social Affairs, of Financial Affairs

and of Environmental Affairs, as well as of the respective Parliaments, and of the European Parliament, especially the different views concerning the use of EU funds to co-finance housing. In addition they confirm they will report on the outcome of these discussions at their next informal Ministers' meeting,

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- that the subject of "the impact of EU policies on national housing policies", is of such a nature that it should become a standing agenda item at every future EU Housing Ministers' meeting,

- that in order to achieve best results and use resources effectively it is important that many different means and different partners – including representatives of the residents in the areas being developed – are considered in the implementation of sustainable refurbishment of high-rise residential buildings and restructuring of surrounding areas,

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a supprimé: organizing meetings between interested private for-profit and

a supprimé: non-profit parties

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- that integrated European cooperation should include converging policies for housing data/statistics, and that they appreciate the proposal of Italy to co-ordinate the next publication of "Housing Statistics in the European Union", and stress the need for the use of standard systems in gathering comparable data and statistics,

- that Luxembourg will host an EU expert meeting during the EU-Luxembourg Presidency on 9th and 10th June, 2005. Strategies in favour of the reduction of CO₂ emissions in the housing sector will be the theme of the expert meeting,

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- that an update be prepared by Austria on the issue of employment generation effects of housing investments,

- that they equally appreciated the fact that France proposed to co-ordinate the next (2005) publication of annual national housing progress reports in the EU,

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- that they will promote, to the applicable extent, the establishment and regular updating of the websites of their respective ministries in order to facilitate easy and speedy international access to information on national housing policies,

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- the invitation of Spain to host the 2006-annual meeting of European Housing Ministers. The special theme for discussion at that meeting will be determined later.

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