



CONFEDERACION DE EMPRESARIOS DE LA CONSTRUCCION DE ARAGON

Plaza de Roma, F-1, Planta 1ª Ofic. Nº 8 – Tfno. 976-325797 – Fax 976-533675 - 50010 ZARAGOZA

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION OF 11 JUNE 2013 ON SOCIAL HOUSING IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

On 11 June 2013 the European Parliament adopted a resolution on social housing in the European Union on the basis of a report approved by the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs on 30 april 2013.

The resolution includes these findings:

1. access to housing is a fundamental right that can been seen as a precondition to the exercise of, and to access to, other fundamental rights and to a life in conditions of human dignity; guaranteeing access to decent and adequate housing is an international obligation incumbent on the Member States, to which the Union must have regard, given that the right of access to housing assistance is recognised in:

- article 34 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union

- articles 30 and 31 of the revised European Social Charter adopted by the Council of Europe

- articles 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- many Member States constitutions

2. national, regional and local authorities in the Member States have a right, as well as a duty, to define their own housing policy and to take the steps required to ensure that this fundamental right is upheld on their respective housing markets, in accordance with the needs of their inhabitants with the aim of providing universal access to decent and affordable housing.

3. affordable, adequate and secure accommodation as well as investment in affordable housing are :

- a suitable tool for achieving social justice and cohesion

- a precondition for enhanced labour mobility and increased employment opportunities

4. construction and renovation of social housing is crucial for achieving the targets of meeting the housing demand, providing for affordable housing for broad levels of population, boosting economies, keep property bubbles in check, combat energy poverty and ensuring tax income of Member States.



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5. the Member States, in line with the principle of subsidiarity, have an essential role to play, and a wide discretion, in providing, commissioning and organizing the provision of social housing in parallel with with, and in addition to the unplanned market-based housing supply.

6. the provision of social housing should fulfil a high level of quality, safety and affordability and promote equal treatment and user rights.

7. there is a shortage of social housing facilities and an increasing need of affordable housing in most EU Members States due to the social and family profiles of people using social housing has changed. These new social factors should be identified so that Members States and their respective local and regional authorities can define a range of housing strategies that more closely match actual circumstances.

8. social housing policy is an integral part of Services of General Economic Interest.

9. social housing should be characterized by a good relationship between quality and purchase price or rent and permit energy savings.

10. in order to prevent future housing crises, mortgage rules must be designed to protect consumers and to spread risks fairly.

11. social housing plays a key part in the achievement of the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy, in particular its poverty target, including the prevention of the intergenerational transmission of disadvantage, in that it contributes to ensuring high levels of employment, inclusion and social cohesion, to promoting job mobility and to combating both climate change and energy poverty by modernizing the housing stock.

12. the economic and financial crisis is having a direct adverse impact on activity in, and financial support for, the house-building and refurbishment sector, with social housing being hit particularly hard, owing to the bursting of housing bubbles, the contraction of credit, late payments and a fall in new public-sector order. **Therefore, the construction sector can be a driving force in efforts to find a sustainable, inclusive way out of the crisis and to address climate and energy-related challenges.**

13. housing is a basic necessity in respect of which Member States lay down, in line with their own policy choices, minimum standards of habitability and comfort, specific urban planning and construction rules and **maximum income percentages with some regulating house price increases and even establishing mechanisms for providing social assistance or tax support to help out with what is a leading item of household expenditure.**

14. in view of the severe economic, social and long-term impact of the crisis, not only on economic growth, employment rates and poverty and exclusion levels, but also on access to housing and on investment in social housing within the EU, urgent action on the part of



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Member States and the Union is required to guarantee access to decent and affordable housing. Given that housing is the largest household expenditure item in Europe, the sharp rise in housing-related prices (land process, purchase and rental prices and energy prices) is a cause of instability and anxiety and must be seen as a major concern.

15. affordable rental housing is essential for young people in order to take up vocational training, university studies or employment opportunities.

16. 25 million European households are in social housing in respect of which local and regional planning requirements, access rules and prices are laid down directly by the public authorities in the Member States. **Owing to its stability and to the fact that prices are regulated, this parallel housing supply helps in particular to keep property market cycles and housing bubbles in check.**

Promoting the social and economic role of social housing

17. notes that as a result of the current economic and social crisis on its own the market is increasingly incapable of meeting the need for affordable homes, in particular in densely populated urban areas and that rising housing and energy costs are aggravating the risks of disease, poverty and social exclusion.

Is concerned about the taxation of social housing providers.

18. **there is a greater need for affordable housing also for segments of the population that are socially integrated.**

19. point out that European competition policy should under no circumstances serve to undermine economic services of general interest.

Towards a European Social Housing Policy

20. calls on the Commission to set out a European social housing action framework for housing policy in such a way as to ensure consistency between the various policy instruments the EU uses to address this issue.

In the report approved by the Committee it was asked the Commission to bring socio-economic indicators, such as social housing investment, within the scheme of the European Semester by including them in its evaluation of targets for combating and preventing real estate bubbles but this reference has been eliminated in the resolution.

21. Asks the Commission on the basis of an exchange of the best practices and experience between the Member States and taking into account the fact that social housing is conceived



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and managed in different ways in the MS, regions and local communities **to clarify the definition of social housing**

22. calls on the Commission to monitor social investment more closely, using a scoreboard based on indicators of investment at Member State and EU level, which, in connection with social housing investment, takes account of changes in housing costs and **in the number of people waiting to be allocated housing in the MS.**

23. **calls on the Commission to modify the criteria contained in the December 2011 Package of State Aids for Economic Services of General Interest restricting social housing assistance concessions to the most vulnerable social categories; Calls on the Commission and MS to take measures to overcome the difficulties caused by these restrictions.**

24. welcomes the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and the Council of 31.03.2011 seeking to impose restrictions on credit agreements relating to residential property and hence contain excessive household debt.

Calls for EU mortgage provisions to incorporate best practices which are favourable as possible to consumers.

25. **calls on the Commission to warn the MS, in its country-specific recommendations, when reforms are likely to threaten investment in social or affordable housing and not to issue recommendations regarding the size of the social housing sector in individual MS.**

Criticises the fact that, as part of fiscal consolidation programmes and in line with specific recommendation made by the Commission on housing market action, some MS are squeezing capacity in the sector by taxing social housing providers.

Is concerned, furthermore, about the restrictive definition of social housing given by the Commission within the field of competition policy, which only targets disadvantaged groups.

26. **calls on the Council to convene a meeting of the housing ministers of the MS at least once a year to discuss the impact of various EU policies on housing policy and ensure that the economic, social and environmental aspects of the housing sector are mainstreamed more efficiently at EU level, with the involvement of stakeholders such as social housing bodies, associations representing occupants and associations seeking to facilitate access to housing.**

27. proposes the establishment of a European Housing Observatory to step up exchanges of good practices and to develop qualitative and quantitative knowledge about the housing situation in the various countries, including social housing, on the basis of reliable statistical indicators with the involvement of the Commission, relevant socio-economic actors, associations and residents.



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Asks the Commission quickly to launch an analysis on the benefits of establishing such an observatory.

Stresses the need for the regular publication of Eurostat indicators (price, quality) regarding the housing dimension of social integration.

This reference has been eliminated in the EP resolution.

28. notes that a definition of social housing and the beneficiaries should be result of a democratic discussion process in order that the different traditions of the MS may be taken into account.

29. urges the MS to redouble their efforts to include social housing investment in:

their medium-and long-term budgetary objectives

their national reform programmes

the strategic axes of the 2014-2020 partnership contract

Encouraging investment to boost local employment and the green economy

30. emphasises how the housing sector and, in particular, the social housing sector, plays a contracyclical economic role through the support, amongs others factors, for the sustainable local employment that cannot be off-shored, thanks notably to the labour-intensive nature of the sector; believes, therefore, that investment in social housing should be considered not only as an expenditure but also as a productive investment; further encourages the Member States to start a dialogue with the construction industry in order to develop a better business environment for, and better regulation of social housing, with special regard to the establishment of residential building targets, the arrangement of infrastructural costs and supply of development land.

31. highlights the added value in terms of local employment and the considerable leverage effect on investment resulting from the direct impact of the Structural Funds in the social housing sector in period 2007-2013.

32. recognises that many Member States have already put in place effective social housing policies and believes that the role of the EU in this context should be to facilitate the exchange of the best practice across the Member States.

33. calls on the Member States, their managing authorities and the Commission to include housing stakeholders, residents associations and associations for access to housing among



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their closest interlocutors for the drawing up, monitoring and assessment of partnership agreements and operational programmes.

34. calls on the Member States in order to stimulate high-standard construction and renovation of social and affordable housing to strengthen or develop specific financing mechanisms, as well as to encourage, in a coordinated manner, recourse to Horizon 2020 grants and the use of financial instruments and technical assistance programmes offered by the Structural Funds, the European Investment Bank (EIB), among others; calls on the Member States, furthermore, to seek ways to apply the modified ERDF regulation in order to provide housing for marginalised communities.

35. calls on the EIB, in close consultation with local and regional authorities, to place greater emphasis on the social and affordable housing sector when setting its investment priorities, in particular in those Member States which do not have a public housing bank, whilst relaxing the terms under which it grants loans; calls as well as on the EIB determine the scope for using project bonds as an instrument to finance social infrastructure, such as housing, taking into account the assessment of its pilot phase before extending it.

36. asks the Commission to make other potential sources of financing available to Member States for the development and renovation of social housing stock as forms of social investment, as well as to encourage Member States and regional and local authorities to make effective use of available European funding, and to retain the reduced rates of Vat that apply to such investment, given the labour-intensive nature of the sector and its very limited impact on cross-border trade within the EU; urges that consideration be given to applying the same rates of Vat social housing as to basic necessities; encourages Member States to mobilize private savings in order to both facilitate access to land and encourage the construction and renovation of social housing.

37. welcomes the Commission communication of 31 July 2012 on a strategy for the sustainable competitiveness of the construction sector and its enterprises; takes the view that, in addition to tax incentives and financial support to boost the competitiveness of and innovation in this sector, measures to improve workforce skill levels are essential if we are to meet challenges linked to the creation of a resource-efficient Europe and a low carbon economy, and achieve the objectives set in the directives on energy efficiency and on the energy performance of buildings.

Combating poverty and promoting inclusion and social cohesion

38. expects the Commission to examine to what extent direct support by housing allowances or indirect support by social housing itself, is a more effective measure to provide affordable housing for social groups who cannot cover the housing needs on the housing market.



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39. notes with the concern the fact that many Member States faced with budgetary imbalances are suspending operations programmes and actions (rent and mortgage subsidies, for example) designed to facilitate home acquisition while at the same time, disproportionately increasing property taxes in the midts of an acute economic crisis, leaving many sections of society prey to property and deprivation.

40. recommends that the Member States and their local and regional authoritied draw up integrated policies for promoting social inclusion as well as for guaranteeing universal access to decent, healthy and affordable housing; suggests that these policies include the following measures:

-specific support for good quality and healthy social and very social housing, in particular by setting minimum quotas of social housing where it is relevant such as aereas with high population density where demand is highest, which would encourage diversity

-the establishment of clear, minimum housing quality standards, particularly for social housing

41. calls on the Member States to ensure that all citizens can afford housing by basing rent increases on an objective system ensuring moderate increases in property prices and by adapting tax policy to limit speculation

42. invites the Member States and the relevant authorities to simplify the process of applying for social housing and to make allocation of homes more fair, transparent and impartial, according to the specific incentives, where it is relevant, that aim to develop common and mixed private and social housing space to avoid social segregation

44. regrets the global trend to restrict the provision of social housing and invites the Member States to include the often-excluded group of middle class families in social housing programmes as it may suffer as much from material deprivation as other households as a result of the economic crisis.

45. calls on the Member States and the relevant authorities to make greater use of structural funds (ERDF,ESF) and of the EIB and other financial solutions, in an integrated way, and to facilitate coordination and synergies between them.

Combating energy poverty

46. reiterates that affordability of housing should be seen not only in terms of rent payments but also in terms of associated fuel bills



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47. points out that the housing sector is among those that offers the greatest potential for energy savings; stresses that in the medium and long term energy efficiency measures should in the first instance serve to increase the purchasing power of household

48. providing owners with additional funds for further renovation and improvements in the overall housing stock.