Forward to the European States General for the right to housing EGSH (Brussels, November 5-6, 2007)

A European States General (EGSH) preparatory meeting was held in Bobigny (France) on February 2nd with about sixty people from various countries in attendance. A technical secretariat was set up. This text sets out the confirmed fixtures which will be held at the European parliament in Brussels, on November 5th and 6th, 2007.

To date, preparation varies according to country. In Italy, where a rather large group has planned to hold their first national States General in October, it is well advanced. In France, the fourth edition of the national States General will be held in February 2008. In other countries (Belgium, Spain, Russia, the Netherlands), some groups have expressed their interest but with no operational decisions.

Other social and institutional dynamics should also be taken into account. From an institutions point of view the European parliament approved last May the Andria report on "housing and regional policy". Though insufficient, it does recognize the need to use European structural funds for housing programmes in all EU countries. The report is indeed a good platform to allocate public resources to the social housing service, and even a counterbalance to the European Commission's ambitions of privatizing every service.

As for social movements, the Global campaign 2007-2008: "Act together for housing for all!" which was launched at the 2007 WSF by alternative networks is worth a mention. It will start with the international "Zero evictions Days" (October 2007), a few weeks ahead of the European States General for the right to housing. This is a framework of reference not only for EU inhabitant organizations but also for the Russian federation, Turkey and the Balkans. In these countries, some organizations have already demonstrated an interest in contributing to this mobilization.

At the same time, we must emphasise that the Local Authorities' Forum (FAL) has registered EGSH on its agenda and is supporting it by spreading information and by encouraging the participation of local elected leaders.

In this context, it is therefore easier to foresee the development of multiple initiatives. It is desirable that other networks including IUT, FEANTSA and No-Vox bring their specific contributions to the process. Nevertheless, we must not forget that EGSH is an initial series of meetings which must encourage others. It is not a final result but a beginning; we can already envision one European meeting per year. It is therefore the duty of all: social urban movements, inhabitants' associations, elected leaders,

professionals and progressive political forces, to share the principles of the action call "Working together for a european States general forum on the right to housing", and to work together to ensure the right to housing and to the city in Europe.

Guidelines for participatory EGSH

The principal rule is to permit each potential participant, along with his national and international contacts, to actively participate in the preparation and the running of EGSH.

Preparation

• A distribution list has been drawn up so as to circulate information on the actions, documentation sources, opinions and debate questions.

To register: etats-gnraux-du-logement-en-europe@googlegroups.com

- A questionnaire « experiences form » is widely in circulation (as an attachment) so as to enable better comprehension of the actions engaged in by each country on the right to housing. Once completed, these will be analysed and their contents regularly updated until a final presentation is made during the Member States forum.
- The questionnaire has also been put online (click here) so as to increase visibility and open up the possibility of documentary data capture.

The Management

The GUE group has agreed to host EGSH at the European parliament in Brussels on the afternoon of the 5th November and on the morning of the 6th November, enabling the use of quality translation and interpretation equipment even though the meeting room's full capacity is only 150 people.

Due to the short duration of the forum and the problem of the configuration of rooms we have arranged these meetings and launched debates in advance.

We request that all future speakers keep to the theme of the session and restrict their presentations to a maximum of 5 minutes.

After the first exchange, two half-days could be put in place following demands expressed during the Bobigny meeting on the 2nd February 2007.

For each half-day, two sessions may be organised according to the following model (Each session lasting for about $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours)

- An introduction of the problematic (questioning and re-transcription of the debate previously launched) (10 minutes)
- An expert or important witness (university, leader of association, elected leader...) (10 minutes)
- A coordinator launches the debate, during which two short transcripts prepared on actual field experiences are integrated, following requests made at the discretion of the coordinator.
- The exchange closes with some time (10 minutes) spent on the reformulation of the debate.

MONDAY 5[™] NOVEMBER (afternoon) Evaluation and action plans for the right to housing and the right to the city

- 1st session: Defending and promoting the right to the city
- 2nd session: Defending and promoting the right to housing

Regarding these major challenges there will be a presentation on current actions (position and initiatives taken) to reinforce the inhabitants' dynamics, in particular.

A reminder of the important points of the Bobigny declaration

- General deterioration of the urban environment and the housing situation, as well as the quantity and quality;
- Untenable and unprecedented rises in housing costs;
- Ever-increasing housing insecurity and evictions of poor and ethnic sectors of society (migrants, Traveller's etc.);
- Exclusion of a growing number of people, particularly young people, from the fundamental right to access to decent accommodation;
- Continue international co-operation between campaigns and the increasing opposition in this area by encouraging meetings, the sharing of experiences, and the joint action by social movements and elected officials;
- Establish the key points of the campaign and concrete proposals to make housing a fundamental right across the whole of Europe, particularly by developing a public housing service.

TUESDAY 6TH NOVEMBER (morning) What is Europe's role today and in the future?

3rd session: The European Union's influence on housing policies

4th session: What is next and what are the objectives for our General States?

- The Union's scope of activities with regard to housing and living conditions and possible evolution of these activities (The European Constitution, etc);
- Its current role (the European Court of Justice, the European Commission, especially as regards the Netherlands, the Bolkestein Directive, etc);
- What is the interaction with neighbouring countries (Russia, Turkey, the Balkans)?
- How will the right to housing in Europe be acknowledged?
- What are the interactions with other networks already engaged in this domain? (European Housing Forum, the European Parliament's Urban Housing Intergroup);
- What organisation is necessary for EGSH to ensure continuity? (Annual meetings? Networking?).

Practical issues

For the organisations involved in the technical secretariat a meeting to finalise the organisation of the first Europeans States General is planned for Monday morning and for the organisations and individuals concerned a meeting will take place on Tuesday afternoon to start immediately follow-up action.

According to availability, the possibility to create informal meetings amongst participants on Monday evening exists.

A contact person in Belgium will enable rapid feedback on a wide range of accommodation rates in Brussels.

>>> Fill and send the questionnaire "experiences form" by September 30th 2007

Technical secretariat:

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