



# International Union of Tenants

## Association Internationale des Locataires

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**On the occasion of the Conference of the 20 years anniversary of SON  
Prague, 5 October 2012**

**Speech by Barbara Steenbergen, Head of the EU office of the International Union of Tenants (IUT), Brussels**

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Milan Taraba,  
Dear Anna Pachtová,  
Dear colleagues and friends from SON,

Congratulations with your 20th anniversary! It is a real pleasure to be here with you in Prague, one of the most beautiful cities in Europe.

The Czech Union of Tenants is member of the International Union of Tenants since 1997. SON, represented in the IUT board by Milan and Anna, is- allow me to say that- the strongest union in Central and Eastern Europe.

- Strong, because you are straight in your work for the protection of tenants and more affordable rental housing in the Czech Republic.
- Strong, because you fought for a better Czech way after the fall of the wall than the complete eradication of the public housing sector and the privatisation to owner-occupied housing
- Strong, because you convinced the Czech Government to go for the rental sector- a unique example in Central and Eastern Europe.
- Strong, because you are a well known political player- in Prague as well as in Brussels.

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Dear friends from SON,

We have to work hard to defend the affordable and social housing sector in the future. Private landlords and project developers are filing complaints against EU member states with a broad public social housing sector: Sweden, The Netherlands, and recently France. They state that giving state aid to social housing providers is unfair competition. In return, the European Commission decides along competition rules, defining that access to social housing has to be clearly restricted only to socially disadvantaged citizens.

The IUT says "NO" to that kind of policy. We want social and affordable housing staying accessible for a broader group of medium income households- those households are not able to pay the rents at the over-priced private rental market in the big European cities and regions. On EU average, housing costs represent 41% of the households income!

We need to protect our social welfare systems against these market liberal forces with only one aim on their hidden agenda: creating a new housing scarcity and shortage to increase the prices.

I am very happy to have SON on our side in this struggle- Thanks a lot for your great cooperation in the past, at present and surely in the future!

Thank you SON also for actively supporting the IUT Brussels -without you it would not have been possible to open the EU office.

I'd also like to bring you the congratulations and greetings from my home union, the Deutscher Mieterbund. The bonds of friendship between DMB and SON are very special, and we can look back to an excellent Czech-German cooperation in the last 20 years.

Tenants' cooperation across borders- I wish you a very successful conference and a great birthday party!