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European policy and national housing systems

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Abstract

Housing policy in the European Union is the exclusive domain of national governments. European authorities, however, are using their powers in the area of competition more and more to exert a far-reaching influence on policy areas where the Member States should be autonomous.

In the Netherlands the Housing Act of 1901 forms the public framework for housing associations, which combine public functions with more or less commercial activities. These hybrid organizations fulfil in the Netherlands the public function not only of housing the households with modest incomes, but also of fostering variety in the housing stock and reducing spatial segregation.

Apparently the European Commission underestimates the significance and logic of hybrid organizations. It is important that Member States exercise their autonomous right to shape their own housing policies to the full. European competition policy, in itself a necessary and useful policy domain, must not be misused to thwart national housing aspirations.

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