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European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup (ARDI)

European Commission President Ursula Von Der Leyen meets Members of the European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup's Bureau

Brussels, 28.07.2020: On June 4 2020, the European Parliament's Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup wrote a letter to the Commission's President Ms Ursula Von Der Leyen and expressed their concern about denial of racism in the EU. They have sent a long yet not exhaustive list of manifestations of racism in Europe and asked Ms President to break the silence and publicly acknowledge and condemn racism in the European Union, while also recognizing severity of systemic and structural racism including police brutality, as well as publicly condemn any denial of racism in the European Union. ARDI asked Ms Von Der Leyen to express her support towards all people who experience racism and xenophobia and offered a meeting to discuss these important issues at her earliest convenience. President Von Der Leyen responded positively.

The meeting happened on July 28, 2020 and focused on the Commission's Action Plan against Racism and Xenophobia. The Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup Presidents' proposals aimed at sharing concrete suggestions about how to use the momentum and not stop the intense debate which started in the EU institutions after the tragic death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests all over the world.

Ms Von Der Leyen reaffirmed a strong and decisive stand against racism, violence and injustice, shared during [the plenary session of June 17, 2020](#) when the European Parliament held a debate with resolution titled "The anti-racism protests following the death of George Floyd", adopted few days later. Following a structured debate in College of Commissioners under her leadership on June 24, Helena Dalli, Commissioner for Equality, announced a plan to develop an Action Plan to address racial discrimination, President Von Der Leyen pointed out during the meeting. She as well encouraged anti-racist MEPs to ask responsible actors "how is it possible that we are not able to support capabilities of diverse people". "It is the institution that was not able to create the environment and it is the institution that has to change", she strongly emphasized during the discussion about diversity within EU institutions and mentioned the relevance of top-down approach in this matter.

ARDI Co-President **Samira Rafaela** (Renew Europe, Netherlands) welcomed that President Von der Leyen has committed herself to addressing the problems of racism and discrimination. MEP

Rafaela as well added that she “agrees with her that we need a top-down approach, leading by example in our own institutions”. “We need to start from the inside of the EU institutions themselves, because if we don't do that, and don't have the right representation at all levels, the right questions will never be raised or listened to”, she explained. “As President von der Leyen said 'the institutions have to change', and I am looking forward to seeing her initiate this change in the Commission”, she concluded.

ARDI Co-President **Dr. Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana**, a German MEP from Greens/EFA) reflected: “Today we had a constructive meeting with President von der Leyen. We discussed anti-racism in Europe and the implementation of the next action plan against racism. I appreciated that the President took into account the idea of having a single coordinator for the fight against racism in the European Union. I also appreciated her recognition of the need for ARDI to be implicated in the ongoing development and implementation of the upcoming action plan on anti-racism. Together we will succeed in fighting racism and ensuring a Europe where the principle of equality prevails for all.”

Younous Omarjee, a French MEP and ARDI Co-President from GUE/NGL emphasized that “the fight against racism and discriminations is inseparable from the fight against nationalisms”. “It is the Commission's and the EU's role to serve as the best defense against those forces”, MEP Omarjee added.

Monica Silvana Gonzalez, a Socialist and Democrat from Spain and ARDI Co-President highlighted that it is 12 years now since the Equal Treatment and non-discrimination Directive was blocked. “I truly believe that this should be our great achievement among all and especially under the leadership of the Commission with Ms Ursula Von der Leyen leading”, she said.

Co-President **Romeo Franz** (Greens/EFA) from Germany voiced the fact that Romani people are EU citizens and added that “equality can be achieved when EU and Member States will make the fight against antigypsyism a priority, especially in the post 2020 context, when policy for the equality, inclusion and participation should be binding for Member States, not as an obligation, but as a need to balance to socio-economic situation among the EU citizens”.

Peter Pollak, an MEP from Slovakia and ARDI Vice-President from European People's Party, pointed out different manifestations of racism and discrimination, such as unequal access to education or basic infrastructure, including access to drinking water experienced by many EU Roma citizens. He also shared a principal message of the importance of fighting extremism, in particular among young people and role of education in addressing it.

For more information, contact Jelena Jovanovic, ARDI Coordinator at jelena.jovanovic@europarl.europa.eu

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