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PRESS RELEASE

European Parliament Anti-Racism and Diversity Intergroup (ARDI)

*The ARDI Bureau's cooperation with the European Commission proves fruitful:
European Commission about to launch an Action Plan against Racism and appoint
an EC Anti-Racism Coordinator*

Brussels, 16.09.2020: Today the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen set out combating racism as a priority as part of her first State of the Union address. While pointing out that “fighting racism will not be optional”, she as well announced concrete steps that the European Commission is going to take. A long-awaited Anti-Racism Action Plan is expected to be launched this week. First ever Anti-Racism Coordinator is to be appointed. Addressing gaps in existing legislation, using EU budget, a stronger commitment to enforcement, a proposal to extend the list of EU crimes to all forms of hate crime and hate speech are all highly tangible tasks that President von der Leyen announced too.

This is a historic State of the Union address that proved the ARDI Bureau's cooperation with the European Commission fruitful and that reaffirmed a strong and decisive stand against racism, violence and injustice. President von der Leyen stood up against denial of racism, broke the silence and contributed to recognizing severity of systemic and structural racism in the European Union.

ARDI Co-President **Dr. Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana** (Greens/EFA, Germany) greeted the announcement of an anti-racism coordinator with great enthusiasm: “Following months of advocacy, and our meeting with President von der Leyen in July, I am very pleased that our call for an anti-racism coordinator has been answered. I look forward to continuing to work together to achieve the ambitious goals outlined in the new action plan.” She went on to say: “I feel that we are moving closer towards ‘a truly anti-racist union’ and we must keep this momentum to ensure that we reach our common goal.”

ARDI Co-President **Samira Rafaela** (Renew Europe, Netherlands) said: “It is important that the European Commission will put forward new legislation that makes Member States also responsible for the implementation of the anti-racism action plan. The active involvement of Member States is essential for our common mission against racism and discrimination. Being close to all our citizens, the involvement of civil society is also crucial for successfully carrying out the anti-racism action plan.”

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ARDI Vice-President **Hilde Vautmans** (Renew Europe, Belgium) welcomed the fact that “the announcement of an EU action plan reflects Europe’s ambition to move beyond statements and shows that the EU is truly serious about acting against racism and discrimination”. She commented: “It is really stimulating to hear about clear and measurable goals and concrete actions to tackle racism and structural discrimination in Europe, such as the proposal to extend the list of EU crimes to all forms of hate crime and hate speech to give an example.”

Peter Pollak, a Slovak MEP from EPP and ARDI Vice-President reflected: “I welcome the personal commitment of the President of the European Commission fighting all forms of intolerance in our societies, also against Roma. We are all human beings, born free and equal in dignity and rights. This is an imperative we have to stick to. What a pity, that there are still people with different mind-sets and that an Action Plan against Racism is at all needed. I am hopeful that EU Member States will take subsequent implementation action to meet all the measures contained therein. At the moment we talk a lot about EU economic recovery. However, if we want to succeed, equality should be placed in heart of recovery process.”

Younous Omarjee, a French MEP and ARDI Co-President from GUE/NGL emphasized that “President Von der Leyen has raised the level of political support in the fight against racism” and that “this becomes a new priority axis for the Commission”. “This is in itself a huge step forward. Let us keep in mind that wherever nationalist temptations progress, when the aggravation of discrimination is encouraged, it spells the retreat of Europe. The fight against racism and the defense of EU values are the same fight”, MEP Omarjee concluded.

Evin Incir, a Swedish MEP and ARDI Co-President commented: “I welcome this initiative by the commission and am happy to have been a driving force in making this issue a priority. Regrettably, in many parts of the union nationalist and racist parties and extremist organisations are taking a stronger hold on our societies. On the other hand we have seen a summer of ordinary people mobilising to protest against racism and racist structures. This is the time to move forward and go on the offensive for our common values and to build a union of equality”.

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