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Bold social ambition must drive the recovery

Green and progressive Ministers statement

The pandemic has laid bare, and in many cases worsened, deep rifts in our societies. As we emerge from this difficult and painful period, we should take a moment to reflect on what kind of future we want to create. Coming out of this crisis cannot mean a return to business as usual: We need ambition and solidarity to tackle social injustice, discrimination and inequality. Otherwise, the recovery from this crisis will inevitably only benefit the few.

We, Green and progressive ministers from Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Luxembourg and Spain are working to build a more social, just and fairer Europe. The time has come to transform Europe into a continent that puts people and planet at the centre of the economy, rather than the other way around.

Ahead of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (ESPCO) Council Meeting this week, and following the Porto Social Summit in May, our message is clear: social justice and environmental justice go hand in hand. Human rights must be at the heart of EU policies.

Today, EU Ministers will debate key issues that, if taken seriously, could help to deliver social justice in the EU. While the Portuguese Presidency has worked hard to deliver a more 'social Europe,' we still see a blocking minority of governments preventing essential pieces of legislation such as the horizontal EU anti-discrimination directive that would prohibit discrimination against people for the gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief, racial or ethnic origin, disability or age. This cannot continue.

The current economic system also discriminates against those that are not considered part of the productive or extractive economy and fails to give workers the rights they deserve. We cannot let the 'gig economy' and precarious work contracts become the norm for working people and undermine Europe's small and medium enterprises. Across Europe, we need to strengthen the rights and possibilities for collective bargaining and social dialogue and to make sure that green policies and social justice are the basis of our new production models.

As we take the bold and necessary steps to fundamentally change our economic system to ensure justice for all within the limits of our living planet, we must ensure that nobody is left behind. Today, in Europe, we still have at least 700,000 people sleeping rough or in homeless shelters. We Greens and progressives are working hard in government and in the European Parliament to put 'housing first' and ensure that everyone living in Europe has a place to call home. Ahead of the Porto Summit, we called for a specific commitment to end homelessness by 2030, which we expect to see adopted at the Conference on

Combating Homelessness in Lisbon next week.

Across Europe, there is an alarming increase in the numbers of children living in poverty. Poverty, inequality and the pandemic are creating an uncertain and precarious future. We very much welcome the European Child Guarantee, which is urgently needed so that every child in poverty can have access to healthcare, education, childcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition. Member States action to implement the European Child Guarantee should start immediately. Europe must invest in young people and prioritise the generations to come. Together, we can reduce poverty, protect the most vulnerable and secure a future for all children in Europe.

The future of our continent rests on our ability to leverage the recovery from this Covid-19 crisis to deliver social justice by putting people and planet at the centre of our policy-making.

Signed by:

Ska Keller and **Philippe Lamberts**, co-Presidents of the Greens/EFA Group

Yolanda Díaz, Vice-president of the Spanish Government, Minister of Labour and Social Economy

Henri Kox, Luxembourgish Minister for Housing and Internal Security

Wolfgang Mückstein, Austrian Minister for Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection

Roderic O'Gorman, Irish Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Sarah Schlitz, Belgian State Secretary for Gender equality, Equal opportunities and Diversity

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Attached documents

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