

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen
European Commission
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels

By email

30 April 2020

RE: Democracy is a prerequisite for a green and just recovery

Dear President von der Leyen,

We are writing to request that the Commission pay urgent attention to upholding democratic values and human rights as part of the European Union's plan for a green and just recovery.

The European Council¹ has called for an EU Covid-19 recovery plan that integrates "the green transition and the digital transformation". This is necessary to reduce the EU's GHG emissions and to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Beyond these objectives, investing in a green recovery means investing in a just and community-led transition to an economy that respects natural boundaries, with high-quality jobs that will sustain people even during times of crisis. It means allowing for workers in all economic sectors to be unionised if they desire so, and to give them the social rights that make our societies resilient, from sick pay to collective bargaining. It will also deliver an improvement of our health and well-being, for example through better air quality and less exposure to toxic chemicals.

However, none of this will be achieved without strong and inclusive democratic institutions. In order for the EU to deliver on a green and just recovery, all levels of government must respect fundamental rights and the rule of law. Otherwise, EU funds will not reach their rightful beneficiaries and regulatory conditions will not be met. For that reason, we call on the Commission to:

- Make EU funding subject to respect for fundamental rights and the rule of law, including an independent justice system, free media, strong and independent civil society, etc). Strengthen 2018 budget proposals² to that end.
- Additionally, propose that EU funding is also subject to participation in the European Public Prosecutor's Office. Any mismanagement of EU funds must be investigated and prosecuted in an impartial and independent manner.
- Monitor the emergency measures introduced during the pandemic. Pressure governments to lift any restrictions of fundamental rights and the rule of law that are unnecessary and disproportionate to the objective of curbing the pandemic. Launch legal procedures if necessary to force EU governments to restore fundamental rights as soon as the crisis ends.
- Ensure that any use of digital technologies to monitor the spread of the virus is lawful, ethical, and strictly temporary. The use of the data for any commercial and political purposes must not be allowed.
- Make more direct funding available for local and regional authorities.
- Support environmental watchdogs, such as NGOs, during the pandemic by helping to maintain their funding.

¹ [Joint statement of the members of the European Council](#), 26 March 2020

² [Commission proposal COM\(2018\) 324 final](#)

Europeans have a – justified – expectation that the EU not just steps in to support countries in their fight against Corona, and to alleviate social and economic hardship. The EU must also step in to protect people’s fundamental rights, including the right to free elections, to free speech and to assembly. This will make the EU, with all its member states, resilient to the ongoing and any future crisis - including the deepening climate and ecological crisis.

Yours sincerely,



Anelia Stefanova
Programme Director
CEE Bankwatch Network



Jorgo Riss
Director
Greenpeace European Unit



Génon K. Jensen
Executive Director
Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)