

Our Europe, a safe and good home for the people

Europe is our home. As EPP, we have built a Europe where people's dignity, security and freedom always come first. We, as Europeans, are more than the sum of our national identities. Our history, our heritage, our Judeo-Christian roots, and our cultural diversity define us. United in diversity is a unique strength that has made peace and prosperity possible for most Europeans.

Faced with a complex world, some believe that everyone should dream of being a 'global citizen' without roots. Others want to close all doors and retreat into national egoism. We do not agree! We are proud of our roots and confident about the future. We do not tell citizens what to believe or what to fear, but we listen to them, respect them, and deliver for them. We are bridge-builders. EPP invented our social market economy, which balances economic freedom with social responsibility. EPP stands for a strong democracy based on rule of law which means that it is the citizens who really decide. EPP fights for a strong Europe that protects its people.

We believe in our European way of life. Freedom is key, but freedom without security is an empty word. Our people expect a Europe that makes them feel safe in every facet of their life. Our people want secure jobs that ensure a good life and support growing families. Our people expect Europe to champion a life with freedom, justice, and democracy.

We stand for a strong Europe that speaks with one voice on democracy, rule of law and freedom. A Europe that confidently stands up to autocrats and stands by those who fight for our European way of life, as Ukrainians are doing against Putin's aggression. A Europe that protects its borders and tackles illegal migration.

We stand for a competitive Europe that boosts its economy and creates quality jobs, while building a good economic future for everyone. We believe in European leadership in climate protection not only to safeguard our planet, but also to promote economic prosperity and food security with less bureaucracy, while boosting innovation and a future-oriented energy union. We want Europe to shape and lead the future by investing in state-of-the-art infrastructure, innovation, and digital technologies. An open Europe that also protects its own interests. We want to provide our citizens and companies with access to global markets by concluding smart, reciprocity-based trade agreements with like-minded partners.

We stand for a citizens-oriented Europe that supports families, creates opportunities for all, promotes equality between women and men, and solidarity between generations. A Europe that protects and cares for the most vulnerable in our society, online and offline. A Europe that ensures every technological innovation puts people first. A Europe that turns brain drain into brain gain. A Europe that invests in health research, guarantees high health and care standards, and fights diseases.

We stand for a democratic Europe where the people decide, a Europe that upholds its core values, within and beyond its borders. A Europe which guarantees that citizens are equal before the law and regains the trust of those who feel unheard or left behind.

Europe holds all the right cards to shape the future. As the EPP has done over the last decades, we will keep Europe together, we will defend the European way of life based on freedom, pluralism, subsidiarity, solidarity, democracy, the rule of law, and promote sustainable

economic growth and development. With the EPP in Europe's driving seat, Europeans will be stronger and safer.

I. Our Europe protects its citizens!

There is no freedom without security. Those who love freedom must also value security. Unlike other political forces, we do not put freedom in conflict with security. We take citizens' safety concerns very seriously, but instead of dividing societies, we focus on solutions. We need full Schengen admission for Bulgaria and Romania, lifting not just air and sea controls, but also land border controls, as soon as possible. Only an enlarged Schengen area will make the EU stronger, and our borders better protected. Only with a responsible political approach can we really protect our citizens.

1. Our Europe protects its borders against illegal migration

European Member States, not smugglers, must decide who enters Europe. Thanks to the EPP, this principle once again applies in Europe. We agreed on the New Migration and Asylum Pact at the end of 2023, expanded Frontex to 10,000 staff in recent years, financed physical border controls at the EU's external borders and have already begun closer cooperation with Tunisia. Thanks to our efforts, the Migration Pact represents a new beginning for Europe's migration policy based on our priorities, such as better screening of irregular arrivals, more solidarity in times of crisis, as well as strong protection of human rights, with special attention to vulnerable people. Despite a complete refusal by the extreme right and the resistance of the left to reduce illegal migration in Europe, we will continue on our path: we will triple the number of Frontex staff to 30,000 and transform it into a real border and coast guard. Together with their national colleagues, Frontex officers will be able to better protect the EU's external borders, especially because the EU will finance the expansion of border protection facilities even more than before. At the same time, the EU will increase the number of asylum applications processed in special asylum centres located in third countries. In addition, we will conclude agreements with third countries in order to speed up returns and ensure that recognised asylum seekers can also be granted asylum in third countries. We are committed to the fundamental right to asylum, but the EU, together with its Member States, must have the right to decide. We believe a new model of cooperation among equals with Africa is possible, we want to conclude a new pact with the African countries in order to address the root causes of migration more effectively and, above all, foster economic prosperity and a bright future for the African continent by preventing a brain drain of the younger generation. Instrumentalization of illegal migration must be stopped. We will not allow any country to blackmail Europe as Lukashenko's regime attempted in 2021.

2. Our Europe is determined to fight terrorism and organised crime

We want to leave no room for terrorists and organised crime in our Europe. But national solutions alone will not be able to put an end to international crime. Every year, international criminal organisations earn around 139 billion euros in Europe alone - more than the state revenues of Poland, Ireland, Greece, or Portugal. One of the most heinous crimes, human

trafficking, grew by 10% between 2020 and 2021, with over 7150 victims recorded, while the number of suspected traffickers rose by 12.5%. Terrorism also continues to pose a serious threat to our citizens. Between 2018 and 2022, there were 342 completed, failed, or foiled attacks in the EU. Our Europe is declaring war on mafia organisations and international terrorists. We are committed to stopping their financial flows. To this end, we will significantly expand Europol, equipping it with all legally available competences in the fight against terrorism and international crime and more than triple its staff from 650 officials today to 3,000. We will also make sure our national databases are safely connected with those of international security authorities and that the sharing of information between law enforcement agencies and security services is strengthened between EU member countries. We must guarantee, update, and develop our EU strategies on cyber security by strengthening the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) to ensure our systems, data and infrastructure are safe from cyber-attacks. We will strengthen the instrument of the European arrest warrant and ensure its successful application throughout Europe.

3. Our Europe stops violence against women

We want a Europe where women have the right to live without fear of any form of violence. The decisive fight against organised crime is also a fight for the rights of oppressed women. Human trafficking affects between 70,000 and 140,000 people every year in Europe, 84% of which are forced into prostitution. We want 1,000 officers from the new posts to be created deployed in a Europol special unit against prostitution and trafficking of women. But there are also alarming figures on violence against women in daily life: every second woman has experienced sexual harassment. Unfortunately, domestic violence is too often a part of everyday life in the EU. On average, two women in the EU are killed by a partner or family member every day. Only a third of cases of physical or sexual abuse within the family are reported to the police. Time for action! Our Europe is taking decisive steps towards ending violence against women. As a first step, we want to criminalise violence against women everywhere in Europe, applying the same standards to punish perpetrators, by including "violence against women" as a crime in Article 83(1) TFEU. The Istanbul Convention must be fully implemented throughout the EU and violence against women in the EU must be fully penalised. Additionally, violence against women in the digital space must be combatted even more vigorously. At the same time, however, we must put the issue even more firmly on the political agenda on all levels in order to prevent violence and act swiftly to support victims, their needs and their security. Enabling and empowering women is crucial, and to do so, education is key. No woman should be afraid of walking freely on the streets, or fear retaliation from a partner or any form of abuse in her private or professional life.

4. Our Europe protects its citizens online and offline!

The pandemic taught us important lessons when it comes to Europe's ability to manage unexpected crises. It was blatantly clear that when we are united, we are the strongest. That is why we want to create a true Civil Protection Union force linked to strategic reserves of food, water, medicines and medical equipment, in a spirit of solidarity to prevent and help face disasters in Member States. In this framework, we also want to create an operational European Firefighters' force, to be swiftly activated whenever a Member State is in need.

Yet, new threats arise online as well. Our Europe does not look the other way or hide behind data protection when it comes to fighting crime in the digital world! The most vulnerable in our society – children – are targets of criminals in the digital world. Globally, 1 in 3 children report experiencing bullying online. In 2020, 33% of girls and 20% of boys in Europe reported experiencing disturbing content online at least once a month. The EU is the largest host of child abuse material globally. Over 60% of child abuse material worldwide is on EU servers. An unacceptable situation! We need an action plan against child abuse, cyberbullying and new dangers, such as cyber threats that may lead to kidnapping and other forms of violence. These crimes are abhorrent. We want to use all proportionate instruments to protect children. We advocate the storage of IP addresses for all the most serious criminal offences, especially in the fight against child abuse in accordance with the requirements of the European Court of Justice. Traces must also be secured at the digital crime scene. We also want to better protect our children from cyberbullying online. To this end, cyberbullying should be considered a criminal offence throughout Europe and anonymity on social media should be abolished.

Today we can only live safely if we leave no stone unturned to catch criminals in the digital world! The share of cyber-attacks targeting EU countries has risen from 9.8% to 46.5% in the past 6 months. Cybercrime is no longer a niche in crime statistics. Since 2015, it has doubled worldwide, reaching 5.5 trillion euros. Our economy is also affected. For example, more than every second SME recorded cyberattacks. In addition, digital platforms are often escaping external and internal security, as well as blurring national borders. Only an integrated European approach will make us safer again. We need a European Cyber brigade with clear responsibilities for external and internal security.

5. Our Europe must be able to protect itself

Who will protect Europe if not Europeans themselves? As the EPP, we will always stand with NATO and fully support the strengthening of our alliance with Sweden's accession. But our transatlantic allies will stand with us only if we are also willing to do our part. In the last ten years, Russia and China have increased their defence budgets by nearly 300 and 600% respectively. In contrast, the EU 27 collectively raised their defence spending by only 20%. The US military spent \$877 billion in 2022, while the collective military expenditure of all EU Member States was just over \$200 billion. While the U.S. armed forces use one main battle tank, the EU has 11 to 17 different models. While the U.S. military uses 30 weapons systems, the EU's militaries use around 180. Europe is doing too little and too inefficiently for a world in turmoil: 7 out of 10 Europeans believe the EU needs stronger defence cooperation. The votes in the European Parliament in recent years have shown that Europe will only be strong in the defence area with a strong EPP. We are the political force that stands for a Europe that can defend itself while, at the same time, aiding those who fight for Europe and its values. We will help Ukraine to achieve victory with our technological advantage, economic power and industrial strength, by increasing our economic and military support. For our European defence, we prioritize three important steps: firstly, we must step up our armament production capabilities: Europe must be equipped with the right weapons to defend itself. The EPP has already championed initiatives of joint military procurement, such as European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP). We want the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to provide the resources to innovate and meet our military needs. Ultimately, we should create Single Market for Defence. Only by greatly improving our

existing military capabilities will we be able to stand up to aggressors such as Russia's Vladimir Putin. Secondly, we must work more and better together. We will improve the financing and execution of joint defence projects through PESCO, notably the project on military mobility which supports crucial cross-border military transport. We also need to establish a Commissioner for Defence, who will better coordinate defence issues within the framework of EU competences, promote cooperation and, at the same time, ensure that there is an EU defence budget of at least 0.5 EU GDP, in addition to the national budgets. Finally, our long-term goal is to develop a true European Defence Union with integrated European forces on land, sea and air by 2030. These forces should complement national military forces, aligned with NATO's new force model, with a rapid deployment capacity of a permanent and immediately available force, and gradually extend towards a "European Corps". Our collective action should also focus, in particular, in areas such as cyber defence and security of space, and help national authorities pool their resources and better coordinate. The EU, together with willing Member States, must also tackle future European projects in close cooperation with our transatlantic partners, such as a missile defence shield, a European DARPA, a European nuclear shield and increasing our production capacities for defence goods in a coordinated manner.

6. *Our Europe speaks with one voice in the world!*

Europe can only represent its interests in the world if it speaks with one voice! Europe must not allow itself to be divided or stuck. We therefore advocate replacing the unanimity principle in foreign and defence policy decisions with qualified majority voting. The representatives for foreign policy so far appointed by the Social Democrats have often failed to fulfil their role. Hence, the EPP calls to replace this position with an EU foreign minister and appoint a European Security Council to support them so that the EU can react quickly to international crises, and coherently follow through on its foreign policy decisions, for example making sure that sanctions are truly and consistently implemented. In the coming years, the EU will continue to face enormous challenges on the global stage, as the war in Ukraine and the conflict in the Middle East have already shown. Our ability to respond to global events will determine our success. The EU needs a long-term strategy towards key, strategic areas including China, Russia, Africa, Latin America, the Mediterranean region and the Middle East. What the creation of the single market or the euro was in the 1980s and 1990s, foreign and security policy is today. This will determine the fate of Europe.

II. Our Europe believes in a Social Market economy!

The social market economy is our invention. The EPP's economic model has brought prosperity, jobs and social peace to Europe over the past 75 years. In a changing economic world, Europe is coming under increasing pressure: Europe's share of global added value has fallen from 25% to 16%, while China's share has risen from 8% to 27% in the last 20 years. In addition, out of the top 50 global firms only 5 are European, while 21 are from the US and 14 from China.

We must make our economy fit for the 21st century. To do this, we need a policy that does not rely on laissez-faire or ideology, but on economic grounds and social responsibility, while balancing different interests in our economy and society, recognising the challenges of the global economy. Europe needs a new economic miracle, but it will not fall from the sky. It is

only possible as the product of creative researchers, responsible entrepreneurs and hard-working employees. We are creating the right conditions for this without ideological blinkers, but close to the people and with them.

1. Our Europe boosts its economic performance and creates good jobs!

Economic prosperity, ambitious environmental protection and social peace can only succeed in Europe if our economy is also successful worldwide. This is why competitiveness is so crucial. Competitiveness requires sustained economic performance, sufficient freedom for entrepreneurs, good working conditions, excellent innovative drive and an efficient and effective bureaucracy.

Above all, Europe's economic performance depends on a successful single market. Since the creation of the single market the per capita gross domestic product of France, Italy and Germany has doubled and it has increased about threefold in Poland and Lithuania, since they joined. We want to lead our market into the 21st century by deepening it further and, especially by creating a genuine digital single market. At the same time, we want to launch a competitiveness strategy for Europe that will relaunch the spirit of entrepreneurship. Our small and medium-sized enterprises are the backbone of our economic success and create over 100 million jobs. We want to establish an EU Competitiveness Check on every new EU policy initiative and a European Advisory Competitiveness Body for our SMEs, in particular. We also need to streamline the existing regulation: we cannot afford that people have to respect over 20 different legal acts on the same topic, such as in the case of the EU's nature restoration law. Legislation needs to be user-friendly and easy to understand and it must be implemented. We will reduce old bureaucracy by introducing a "1 in, 2 out" principle with an overall objective of reducing the regulatory burden by a third, through a specific action plan. To this end, there will be a dedicated European Commissioner solely for SME issues. To facilitate our businesses, we want to make sure our legislative framework is always up to date. That is why we will introduce a "sunset clause" in EU legislation, where appropriate, so that a law ceases to exist unless further action is required. The European Commission should also periodically check that existing pieces of legislation are not in contradiction with each other. In parallel, we will pursue a forward-looking European industrial and competition policy which will allow the creation of European champions to compete at global level. We want to challenge our competitors, such as China and the US, while defending strategically important European sectors against unfair practices. During the past legislature, the EPP has been at the forefront of advocating for the creation of new regulations aimed at safeguarding critical infrastructure. We want to further strengthen rules to avoid that strategic infrastructure such as ports, as well as most innovative companies are shielded from takeovers by third countries, notably China.

In parallel, we must also increase the innovative drive of our economy by launching an investment plan for European jobs, in which we want to invest in research and development calling Member States to reach a combined investment of 4% of GDP. We will also launch a funding programme to significantly increase the number of women-led start-ups in areas of technological innovation, such as AI. For a vibrant business environment, we want to improve the supply of fresh capital so that our economy can continue to invest in the future. This requires not only the strengthening of the internal market for financial services, a capital

market union and a banking union, but also sound fiscal policy. In addition, only with price stability will growth be sustainable for us and future generations. A sustainable economy also means that young people have a chance to build their careers. We will continue to combat youth unemployment, expand Erasmus+ and strengthen Discover EU. We believe all workers should benefit from Europe, that is why we want to ensure fair working conditions throughout the EU and promote labour mobility with a European Social Security Pass.

2. Our Europe creates prosperity with and in the world

Exports are a crucial drive for our economy. More than 30 million jobs in the EU depend on external trade and 90% of global economic growth is expected to be generated outside Europe in the coming years. EU's trade deficit with China had doubled in two years to a record €390 billion in 2022. We need a boost in trade policy and often have to overcome the blockade of left-wing and right-wing populists. This is not about trade at any price! Rather, it is about securing and expanding our own prosperity and, at the same time, strengthening important economic and political partners. A value-led economic policy relies on trade. We need a new smart trade policy in line with our European interests, values and standards in order to foster a closer cooperation with like-minded partners in a Union of Democracies, especially to counter China's growing dominance in the world. The Mercosur trade agreement and the trade agreements with Australia, Mexico and India must finally be adopted. At the same time, we need negotiations with the USA and an improved trade agreement with Canada (CETA+). The western world must stand together economically. We also need to open a new, more intensive trade partnership with Africa. Only together with the African continent will we succeed in solving migration issues, as well as global dependencies on raw materials and energy. The de-risking strategy outlined by the President of the Commission must be advanced further.

3. Our Europe needs energy

It is not without reason that coal and steel were the foundations of European integration. Our Europe has always relied on shared energy. Today, with the conflict with Russia and the systemic competition with China, this is all the more important. We want a European Energy Union that will lead us into a climate-neutral future. We do not need a prohibitive Europe, but an innovative Europe that places the economic, financial and social needs of its citizens at the centre of the future energy supply. We are in favour of a technology neutral approach, including nuclear energy, where and when it makes sense. We also need to better align our energy transition with local conditions. For example, in the area of energy-efficient home renovations, we will better align investments to help households cope with rising prices and renovation requirements in the next years.

At the same time, Europe needs more drive and energy when it comes to its future resources. For example, Europe will need 60 times more lithium for a sustainable battery supply in 2050 than it does today. Innovations without resources are unthinkable and are increasingly pivotal in economic competition. For example, global technology leadership in the field of e-mobility will not succeed without rare earth elements from Africa, Latin America and Asia. We will promote a common European resource strategy that creates the resources for future innovations, better recognises the existing resources worldwide, using them for Europe, while

promoting diversification to avoid dependencies from third countries. We will not allow Europe to be heavily reliant on Putin's or any other autocrat's resources in the future.

4. Our Europe safeguards the planet with smart solutions

Europe has a leading role to play in global climate protection. To achieve our ambitious goals, we must make climate policy go hand in hand with our economy and society. Without climate protection, our economy cannot remain competitive in the long term, but without a competitive economy there can be no sustainable climate protection either. We are clearly committed to the 55% CO2 reduction target and the goal of climate neutrality by 2050. Europe must not de-industrialise on this ambitious path, but, on the contrary, must show the world that the climate-neutral transformation can be achieved successfully through our businesses. It is important to support our companies - especially SMEs - financially in the transformation and to find the best solutions for reducing emissions - particularly worldwide. We will only achieve the best solutions if we use all technological possibilities. We reject a ban policy - such as the ban on combustion engines - and will also revise it as soon as possible. We are in favour of technological openness in the economy, energy and climate protection. Engineers, not politicians, deciding on the best technology. We rely on innovative concepts and market-based instruments for climate protection with emissions trading, the expansion of renewable energies and a circular economy. With this in mind, we want to further develop the Green Deal. All renewable energies are a key factor for successful climate protection, which is why we want to promote photovoltaics, wind power, geothermal energy, hydropower, liquid and solid biomass (e.g. wood) equally. To make Europe's energy secure and sovereign, we are creating an Energy Union. We want to strengthen the internal market for energy, build cross-border infrastructure and strengthen Europe as an energy location with research. For example, we need a rapid ramp-up of international hydrogen production and a functioning transport infrastructure, as already provided for in the EU hydrogen strategy. We want to intensify research in the field of energy, climate and materials research and promote Europe as a research centre for innovative nuclear technologies such as nuclear fusion. For us, nuclear power is part of the European energy mix and we cannot do without this option at present.

At the same time, we will promote a circular economy in order to utilise raw materials responsibly, and we will establish a CO2 circular economy throughout Europe and promote sustainable companies, especially SMEs. We also aim to unlock investment in innovation for clean technologies with an investment plan for European jobs. We want strong support for clean tech and more strategic sovereignty in the field of future technologies.

Climate protection is a common European task. We want the EU to become responsible for concluding international environmental agreements for the entire EU.

5. We boost living standards in every region and turn brain drain into brain gain

We want to turn brain drain into brain gain. We will create opportunities for young people to allow families to remain together. Sometimes Europeans have no other option to find good opportunities than to leave their country and their loved ones behind. In Europe, no family should be forced to be divided: we must put a stop to brain drain by providing good opportunities in every region through our cohesion, economic and innovation policy. We want to set up a "Brain Gain" action plan for the whole of Europe that offers young people the

chance to return to their home country from abroad and within Europe. Europe is our home and Europe cares about our homes.

Europe will only be united if cities and rural areas act as one. And our political family already does so: as the EPP, we not only provide the Commission President and the highest number of the heads of state and government, but above all we are represented on the ground, at local and regional level, more than any other political force in Europe. Through structural and cohesion policy, for example, we will prevent the gap between rural regions and urban areas from widening, instead of focusing on closing it. There should be no first and second-class citizens. Hence, we want to strengthen regional investments through the EU budget to close economic, social and territorial disparities. We also want to promote a European plan for rural areas. At the same time, we need to develop modern infrastructure so that people can easily connect, and for data and products to be accessible everywhere in Europe. To this end, we want to accelerate investments in R&D and digital infrastructure, in line with our industrial policy. We need to speed up funding procedures for the next generation of innovators, students, civil society all over Europe. We want to ensure innovation capabilities, access to connectivity, online tools and technologies that support education and business, are accessible to all citizens, including rural and remote areas. A good regional policy, especially in economic terms, is the best response to demographic change. We want a New Pact for intergenerational fairness, making sure our choices today do not burden the generations of tomorrow, including a youth and elderly proof check of all EU legislation.

6. Our Europe wants to lead in digitalisation and human-centred artificial intelligence

Innovation improves people's lives. Against the advancements of China and the US, Europe has a competitive advantage: our common values, the social market economy, and political stability. As Christian Democrats, we put the people at the centre. When we combine values and innovation, we can shape the future of our European way of life and create jobs. Placing our citizens in the centre of our innovation policy means pooling our resources to find the best solutions for everyone. Artificial intelligence, biomedicine, robotics, and visualisation can, in combination with the right human know-how and sensible regulation, create a better world. We want to put these technologies to the service of the people by making seniors more independent, advancing research to find solutions in sensitive areas. For example, to discover novel prevention strategies and treatments in health, to better counter climate change and avoid environmental disasters, to improve mobility and make construction works more efficient and safer. However, Europe needs to regain its ambition. Today, we are investing only half as much in AI as the US. European companies are allocating a smaller proportion of their earnings to R&D than their North American counterparts, a shortfall of around 147 billion euros between 2017 and 2022. Especially in established economies such as Europe, economic growth and future prosperity can only be achieved with innovation and a technological edge. Data, digital infrastructure, and technological expertise are the new gold of an economy. We want to encourage a digital awakening in the coming years and pursue a five-point plan for this by firstly expanding a European digital network across Europe for 5G and 6G together with the Member States. Secondly, we want artificial intelligence but not artificial bureaucracy. We want to enable, develop, and utilise AI, not contain it or hinder it through over-regulation. We want to support research and the development of applications and provide freedom. We must readjust our data protection to the requirements of the digital world. Thirdly, we want to

ensure that AI lives up to ethical standards, while supporting innovation and new technologies, harnessing the power of AI to create quality jobs and a better life for our people; fundamental rights in the digital world must be respected, we will do so by updating the EU charter of fundamental rights in light of the digital revolution. Fourthly, we want to establish a real innovation union for future technologies by better connecting scientific expertise and creating, for example, scientific centres of excellence such as a CERN for AI and an EU research-computing centre to simplify the exchange and data across Europe. Finally, all of this needs sufficient funding. We therefore want to introduce a digital tax on tech giants so that a fair and future-proof digital market can be created with our own funds.

III. We believe in our European way of life

The EPP is the party of the European way of life. We combine tradition and progress and believe in a united Europe in diversity. Europe is rooted in cultural richness and diverse traditions, but this does not hold us into the past. On the contrary: our values show us the way into the future.

1. We defend our European social model

Our quality of life depends on social peace. We are proud of our European social model, where everyone enjoys health insurance and high-quality public and social services, where workers have their rights protected and where there is balance between social interests and market rules. However, social balance is not achieved effortlessly but must be sensitively reached to ensure it is balanced and fair. We are fighting for equal opportunities for women in the labour market: we want to ensure that men and women receive equal pay for equal work. We also want to create a European Workers' Guarantee for the Digital Market, to strengthen our welfare states in the gig economy, such as delivery drivers, and in light of the digital revolution, empower trade unions. We want to ensure quality jobs across Europe with today's work models that allow parents to find the right balance between their professional careers and family duties, through greater use of teleworking, for example. For us, however, a true social policy is not about setting the highest social benefits and standards at EU level, but about consistently guiding the economic and financial policy in such a way that there will continue to be efficient social systems that support people in all our Member States in the future. We reject a sprawling EU social bureaucracy. It is not without reason that Catholic social teaching has enshrined the principle of subsidiarity. Especially in times of digital, climate-neutral and demographic transformation, our social systems are already facing enormous challenges. They do not need too many regulations from Brussels, but a flourishing and fair economy. That is why we must always consider the real concerns of our citizens not to overwhelm them in the climate transformation. A fair Europe also thinks about the lower and middle households. The heroes of everyday life must also be rewarded in the tax systems of the Member States.

2. Our Europe preserve our democracy, our traditions, cultural richness and diversity

We are proud of our European way of life. We want to preserve our regional and national identities as well as our common European one. In Europe, we know that our differences, but

also what we have in common, make us stronger. We want to preserve our cultural heritage on which our community, civilization and European integration processes are based on, the different characteristics as well as what unites us, in a Digital Museum of European Culture that digitally connects the most important museums.

Europe is diverse and nuanced, but we have one thing in common: there is a Christian church in every city. Christmas, Easter and Pentecost are holidays that we all celebrate together while respecting our different traditions. We must protect our European way of life by preserving our Christian values and our fundamental principles. Democracy, human dignity, freedom, equality, equal rights for men and women, solidarity, the rule of law, justice, pluralism and tolerance towards those who live a different way: these are the principles at the core of European civilisation. We will preserve our common traditions and convictions, while fighting intolerance and anti-Semitism, as well as protecting LGBTQ+ rights and those of minorities. We stand for religious freedom. We will advocate for an EU foreign policy that makes it very clear that those who persecute Christians can neither do good business nor have good relations with Europe.

Our national identity is open, but not for sale. We offer legal migrants who live with us to become part of our community, but we fight the sale of EU citizenship. Selling EU citizenship to the highest bidder is a direct threat to our security as it leaves Europe to the influence of every oligarch and kleptocrat who can afford it. We will not allow them to undermine the meaning of our citizenship. We want to protect citizens and our democracy against fake news and foreign interference, as well as ensure access to quality information. To this end, we want social media platforms to take more responsibility in the fight against misinformation and, in cooperation with journalists' organisations, strengthen fact-checking. Not being able to tell what is real and what is fake is one of the biggest threats to our democracy and to the stability of our communities.

3. Our Europe takes care of our families and those most in need in society

We believe in a Europe of solidarity that works together, includes everyone, offers the best conditions for starting a family and at the same time ensures that older people can age with dignity. Our Europe does not take care of everything itself, but leaves no one behind. Our families are our roots, our home, our anchors. They are the pillar of our European way of life. In times of crisis, parents and grandparents have supported young Europeans. Family ties are the backbone of our community, and we want to preserve them. We will defend European social standards and raise living standards to strengthen families. In an ageing society, our young people must look after our grandparents. Job insecurity, the inability to afford a house and uncertainty about the future all too often discourage young Europeans from creating a family. In the European Union, on average, only 1 in 4 households have children. We want Europe to be a safe home where new families can grow. We are committed to a Europe-wide minimum parental leave, so that young mothers and fathers can be with their new born children and experience the first steps of parenthood together, and later be easily reintroduced into professional life, with measures such as accessible house ownership and child-care. We will protect family values and respect subsidiarity. Family law must remain in the hands of the Member States, because family life must be supported at a level that is closer to the citizen.

In an ageing society, we will also further develop the "silver economy" to promote active ageing. More than 40% of Europeans are over 50 years old. An ageing society is a challenge, but we also see an opportunity. Seniors are increasingly shaping our economies and starting businesses: they create around 70 million jobs every year. We want to create the conditions for older people to be able to develop economically.

Demographic change will continue to be a huge challenge in the coming legislative period. For this reason, not only will a Vice-President be responsible for this cross-cutting task, but they will also be supported by a newly created agency. A key task will be to launch a European Care Strategy, for example to develop solutions for long-term care for the elderly and other vulnerable individuals in all communities, and to introduce a European Disability card so that the rights of those affected are recognised and acknowledged throughout Europe.

4. Our Europe stands by our farmers and fishers to produce healthy and affordable food for all

Food security is not a luxury, but a fundamental necessity. The EPP has always stood by fishers and farmers, particularly when living costs are rising for our citizens and food security and availability are on the line due to the many global challenges. Fishery and farming are two strategic sectors for Europe. Our fishers are crucial to ensure quality provision and to reduce dependencies on imports. That is why we should have a better focus on this sector through a stand-alone portfolio on fisheries in the next European Commission. Farmers and their businesses make the face of our rural Europe unique. We are proud of them and stand by their side. Rural areas are not the periphery, but the heart of Europe. By 2040, the EU might lose an additional 6.4 million farms, an impressive decrease over 60% as compared to 2016! We want farmers in Europe to have a future and stand for dialogue instead of paternalism. This is the only way to secure our unique cultural landscapes and our food supply in the long term. Climate protection, biodiversity and sustainable landscape conservation can only be achieved with and not against agriculture. Protecting biodiversity and precious resources such as water and forests is our insurance for the future. We want to strengthen Europe's resilience to droughts, which jeopardise our farmers' jobs and our food security, with a European plan for water use, reuse and storage and smart sharing so that Member States can support each other when one of them is in need. We need to make the EU water smart. Climate adaptation and sustainable management are core European tasks. To this end, we want to find examples of best practices, particularly in coastal and flood protection measures.

The CAP 2028-2034 must also have a strong economic pillar in the future that allows farmers to operate more sustainably and generate sufficient income, as well as offering them protection in volatile markets. Direct payments should become a genuine reward for the diverse services provided by agriculture. Our trade agreements must also take account of the concerns of agricultural sector to ensure market opportunities. At the same time, we are focusing on promoting modern and sustainable agricultural practices and high-tech in agriculture. We want a European moon-shot for precision agriculture, integrated pest management and the use of robotics. Especially in agriculture, the ambitious goals should be solved with technological innovations, but not with bans. For example, we want to accelerate the take up on new biotechnologies in agriculture as they can be effective tools against climate related risks. For us, agriculture is a sector of the future, and we want the younger generation

to be fascinated by this profession. Together with Member States, we want to ensure that young people who choose agriculture have access to land with pre-emption rights, to promote the control of sales and rental prices in order to maintain agricultural activity in the future. We oppose excessive requirements for our farmers. This applies in particular to issues such as new rules on the sustainable use of plant protection products (SUR), and unnecessary bureaucracy. We also need an immediate stop to burdens on agriculture. Herd protection measures alone are not enough to ensure a future for grazing livestock farming in Europe. In many areas, we need wolf management that limits the number of wolves and allows wolves to be culled when densities are high.

5. Our Europe improves people's lives through innovation in health

As Christian Democrats, we always put the well-being of the person at the centre of our actions. We are the political force that placed health high on the European political agenda in the past years, by delivering a concrete European Beating Cancer Plan that foresees a funding of 4 billion euros. This is because we know that health issues transcend national borders. We want accessible quality healthcare for all citizens, irrespective of socio-economic status or where they come from. Reducing health inequalities should be the core mission of the EU. For this purpose, it is crucial to eliminate the pay gap to stop the drain of health professionals from some European regions.

We want to create a true European Health Union to be prepared and equipped to deal with cross-border threats, improve the resilience of our health systems, train the best doctors and nurses, diversify our supply chains to prevent medicine and medical devices shortages, making them accessible to every citizen, and become the world leader in medical research and pharmaceutical innovation while increasing access to clinical trials, especially to fight rare child diseases, such as cancer, that do not get enough funding for research.

We want Europe to become the innovation hub of the world in the health sector, harnessing the potential of big data and AI to make the technological discoveries of the future, just as we developed the Covid-19 vaccine with the mRNA technology in record time. Europe must once again become the laboratory of the world where the best medicine is being developed. While ensuring the full implementation of the Beating Cancer Plan, we want to take the next step and develop a European plan to address Alzheimer's disease and dementia together with launching a European Cardiovascular Health Plan, including a European Knowledge Centre, as cardiovascular disease is the biggest killer in the EU.

We know that physical well-being is not all there is to health. Mental health is equally important, as Europeans call more and more for affordable and accessible quality psychological support. That is why we are committed to launch an EU Action Plan for Mental Health to ensure all Europeans in need have access to the appropriate psychological aid, while eliminating the stigma often associated with mental illness.

6. We make Europe fit for the 21st century

Our Europe is a Europe that concentrates on the essentials, never loses sight of the big picture and always fight for what is important. While many social democrats were initially sceptical

towards European unification, the Greens even tried to legally prevent the introduction of the single market and some liberals caused serious damage to a democratic Europe at the decisive moment, not to mention the right-wing populists who want to destroy our Europe today, we as the EPP stand for a strong and effective EU that we will successfully lead into the future.

In order to tackle the enormous challenges in a world in turmoil, the EU must also improve its institutions. We want to make the EU more capable of acting, more efficient, stronger and at the same time more democratic. At the same time, the Member States will continue to have the right to decide which competences the EU should have, and which ones should possibly be transferred back. To this end, we want to have a European Convention in the coming years to discuss and decide on possible improvements to the Treaties. This reform process is also necessary to organise the enlargement process in the best possible way.

We stand by the EU's accession promises to Ukraine, the Western Balkans, Moldova and Georgia based on merit. However, accuracy comes before speed. We do not want an endless process, but the accession criteria must be clearly respected. Every candidate country must also be ready for membership. In the coming years, we want to set an initial deadline of 2030 for possible accessions, identifying, by then, which candidates will be able to join, having fulfilled the criteria, and which ones will need more time. For the latter, we want to agree on close cooperation with the EU below the membership threshold at an early stage in order to bring them into the EU in the medium term. At the same time, we believe that the EU will reach its final borders when these countries join. We reject Turkey's accession to the EU. We should initiate as soon as possible new negotiations with Turkey in order to build a close partnership. We want to conclude an EU-Turkey friendship treaty.

IV. Let's shape Europe