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A Secure Europe

Policy Paper 1

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We Europeans want to live in freedom, prosperity and security. Over more than 60 years, European integration and transatlantic cooperation has enabled us to achieve these goals beyond all expectations. But challenges remain, and they have become more pressing. We still live in one of the most prosperous, peaceful and free places in the world. We should appreciate this, and we want this to remain the case. That is why we must prioritise security, as freedom and prosperity are not possible without it. It is the first and foremost duty of public authorities to protect their citizens and to uphold the rule of law in our societies.

The EPP political family has been at the forefront of efforts to make Europe a safer place. That is because those in our member parties combine competence on security with a solid commitment to values and a keen regard for the recent fears of many of our citizens. Our work will mainly focus on four areas: securing our external borders, preventing illegal migration, fighting terrorism and combatting organised crime and corruption.

In these areas, strengthening the rule of law, good law enforcement, strong intelligence services, effective exchange of information and a strong and resilient civil society, firmly rooted in the core values of the Union, are a precondition to preserving and enhancing the security we live in. Moreover, we must improve and strengthen the EU's role on the world stage. Our Union is based on values and committed to peace all around the world. The EU and its Member States must improve their cooperation and continue to develop capacities to enhance stability, increase prosperity and support the rule of law in the rest of the world. This is a precondition to guarantee peace and security in Europe.

1. Securing our External Borders

Protecting the external borders of the Union, especially of the 'Schengen area', is a precondition for borderless travel and for a borderless internal market. It is also a cornerstone of the cohesion of our societies. Borders which are guarded and protected are a pillar of every functioning state. Within the Schengen area, we take joint responsibility for ensuring effective control of our external borders so that we can maintain borderless travel within this area. It is equally important to help neighbouring non-EU states protect their borders.

In recent years, the EPP has resolutely responded to this challenge. We have encouraged cooperation between national governments on the sharing of data. We are determined to combine these efforts and take further steps.

The EPP insists that the EU's external borders should be closed for illegal migration in particular by breaking the link between rescues at sea and access to EU territory in accordance with international law.

Legal pathways can serve only refugees, who are truly in need of protection according to international law. Our proposal for the EU's resettlement policy outlines common procedures for the resettlement of refugees from third countries. This must include thorough security checks and selection procedures so that we can offer protection to the most vulnerable while closing smuggling routes. Considering the current security situation and the ongoing threat of returning IS fighters, it is of the utmost importance to verify the identity of every single person entering the Union. A priority of the EPP's is rolling out the fingerprint database for asylum seekers, the so-called EURODAC, across the EU. This system enables Member States to store and search for the data of persons deemed to be staying in the EU irregularly and to facilitate their return to their countries of origin. This EURODAC system is a major success of our political family — and it

must be utilised by all Member States.

Building on Frontex, a European Border and Coast Guard has been established that aims to prevent illegal border crossings on land and at sea. This must be further strengthened to support the border and coast guards of EU Member States but also of countries outside the EU. The European Border and Coast Guard should also have a bigger role in returning illegal migrants. Special assistance should be given to those Member States which bear heavy burdens and approve such support. We want to improve the management of our external borders, and we must commit personnel and finances to achieve this goal. EU Member States outside the Schengen area which have already played an important role in the protection of their external borders should receive all the necessary help from the EU partners.

Since 2015, thanks to a combination of effective border control and third-country agreements, the number of arrivals has decreased substantially. However, there are still too many people risking their lives when trying to enter Europe illegally. We must therefore remain consistent in our efforts to ensure the efficient protection of our external borders.

2. Preventing Illegal Migration

Illegal migration can be a source of social tension and can potentially destabilise our societies. Many citizens are concerned about crime and the threat of terrorism. While wars and instability in Europe's neighbourhood have caused refugee flows, especially from the Middle East, illegal migration has risen substantially due to the lack of economic opportunities in countries of origin. We must fight against human traffickers, especially in the Mediterranean, by means of a coordinated approach and via cooperation with the naval forces of Member States, NATO and neighbouring countries. It is unacceptable to leave the choice of who can make it to Europe to human traffickers.

Cooperation with countries of transit is essential: together with the closing of the 'Balkan route', the agreement between the EU and Turkey has largely contributed to tackling the migration crisis of 2015-2016. However, the EU should continue to pay close attention to the situation of human and civil rights in Turkey. Refugees around the globe have the right to protection, safety, autonomy and equal treatment.

The EPP wants to tackle the root causes of illegal migration; therefore we should create prospects for those living in Africa. The continent's unsustainable population growth, the lack of economic opportunities, the effects of climate change as well as corruption and bad governance cannot be ignored: for this reason, the EU Trust Fund for Africa was launched. We want to create employment opportunities and contribute to stability and governance in Africa. We must help and help people in their home countries. We need to invest in the Sustainable Development Goals and develop plans with African countries to reduce population growth, including through investment and access to healthcare as well as by empowering women and strengthening women's rights.

A closer cooperation with countries of origin is needed. The European Agenda on Migration was established to ensure that third countries take back illegal migrants and reintegrate them by respecting humanitarian obligations. This will ultimately reduce the number of newcomers. Furthermore, in conjunction with the creation of safe zones outside the EU, this will also offer people shelter and hope closer to their home countries. The EPP is convinced that the European Union has a humanitarian obligation towards refugees. Therefore, the EU should support refugees and promote the protection of their rights in third countries and countries of origin.

We have a shared responsibility in Europe. Therefore, the EPP has pushed for a harmonisation of national asylum systems in EU Member States to ensure that refugees are being treated equally throughout the EU. Such an asylum system must of course take into account our humanitarian obligation, but also the security of our continent and our societies' capacity to integrate. Therefore,

we need to distinguish between those who qualify for asylum and economic migrants. It is up to EU Member States to decide the best way to integrate persons to whom they have granted asylum or refugee status. Furthermore, EU Member States should effectively return irregular migrants. The EU has significantly improved cooperation with countries of origin with regard to return and readmission. However, more needs to be done, since a credible return policy is an important element of an effective asylum policy.

The right to asylum is part of our international commitments. However, the right of individual to asylum could be verified outside EU' borders to prevent "illegal" immigration or to protect migrants from the dangers of the journey. Abuse of the right to asylum must be prevented. It will take some time to put this into action, and many obstacles will have to be overcome; if we do not address these challenges today, however, they will create an untenable situation.

3. Fighting Terrorism

Although terrorism has existed for centuries, it has only recently, due to its jihad variant, began to affect the sense of security of many of our citizens. High-profile attacks designed to inflict the maximum number of casualties and induce an atmosphere of fear have occurred with increasing frequency since the 9/11 atrocities in the US in 2001. In recent years, Europe has experienced numerous terrorist attacks for which the so-called Islamic State (ISIS/Daesh) has claimed responsibility. But other Islamist organisations, such as Al Qaida, remain active on European soil. The EU has responded with new counterterrorism powers for Europol, the agreement of the Passenger Name Record (PNR) — blocked by the political left and by liberals in the European Parliament for years — and the revision of the Entry/Exit system for stronger controls at the EU's external borders. The EU has also enacted new rules to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing and has taken decisive action against illicit trafficking in firearms and explosives. We will make sure that at all levels of government, combatting terrorism and extremism is a top priority.

We must continue to improve the funding and resources of police forces and security services and strengthen cooperation and information-exchange between Member States and neighbouring countries. Successful border checks rely on all Member States populating the databases with relevant and practical information. Better cooperation on the level of police and intelligence is needed but terrorism and Islamic extremism must be tackled at their roots: with upbringing and education the places to start. We should contribute and encourage a rational Islam in Europe that embraces European values and its cultural and philosophical foundations. Moreover, more attention must be paid to combatting Islamic extremism, which has been a major breeding ground for terrorism. If individuals were prevented from spreading their extremist ideology, there would be no terrorism. Seemingly nonviolent extremism, for example Salafism, also poses a threat because it promotes closed, parallel societies and increases hostility towards the majority of citizens, and even among Muslims. Often, embracing nonviolent extremism is a transition to further radicalisation and, over time, even to the acceptance of jihadist ideas. Therefore, these ideologies should have no place in our societies and should be tackled at all levels. Social networks, such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, are key tools for Islamist groups in the process of radicalising individuals and spreading their hateful and intolerant propaganda. Therefore, internet platforms should be closely monitored, and we should continue combatting and preventing radicalisation on the internet and via social media. The prevention of Islamist radicalisation is a challenge for our society. Therefore, integration policies should be developed and implemented that encourage the cultural and social integration of people of different cultural origins as well as supporting their economic integration into the labour market. Therefore, the EU and its Member States should sanction countries that finance or support Islamist terrorism and also undertake greater efforts to counter nonviolent extremism.

4. Combatting Organised Crime and Corruption

Corruption and organised crime go hand in hand. They strongly endanger peace, social cohesion and ultimately freedom, and they represent a threat to European citizens, businesses, state institutions and the economy. Cyber-security is another area of strategic importance and strong concern. In order to achieve a true pan-European approach to ensure cyber-security, a common European cyber-security strategy should be drafted and implemented. This should also call for regular exchange at a high political level between EU bodies as well as between Member States. Fighting drug trafficking must continue to be a priority for our continent. According to Europol, a fifth of all profits from organized crime comes from the drug trade in Europe.

Corruption and organised crime thrive in environments in which the rule of law is weak and undermine the trust of citizens in the authorities and other institutions. This is often exacerbated by external factors, such as Russia in recent years, and in some Member States of the European Union.

Corruption costs us 120 billion Euros per year. It is a barrier to trade and investment, and to the positive development of society in general.

Organised crime has made our lives less secure and destroys or even costs thousands of lives per year in all EU Member States.

We must address corruption by means of tougher legislation and harsher penalties against perpetrators. The EPP and its members also make a clear commitment to fight corruption and unethical behaviour in politics.