

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 and environmental 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. We take citizens' safety concerns very seriously, but instead of dividing society, we focus on solutions. Only our responsible political approach can truly protect our citizens.

1.1 Our Europe stands for Ukraine

The EPP has demonstrated unwavering support for Ukraine since the very beginning of Russia's full-scale war of aggression. Ukraine defends not only its own freedom, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, but also our shared European values. The EPP will remain a leader in mobilising much-needed EU support and assistance until Ukraine's decisive victory.

It is of paramount importance that the European Union remains committed and united in its support of Ukraine. Europe must, in cooperation with its Allies, find ways amplify its support to Ukraine: this includes political, economic, humanitarian and military aid, for as long as it takes. Europe will stand united with Ukraine against Putin. Ukraine must win the war. This requires certainty regarding the long-term financing of Ukraine for its economic and social recovery, modernisation, and reconstruction. We have delivered in an unprecedented way financial support and military capabilities. We have protected millions of Ukrainian refugees. We have created a lifeline to the Ukrainian economy by supporting their exports to the world. We have developed biting EU sanctions regime against Russia and are effectively addressing sanctions circumvention, while further strengthening their scope where and when necessary. The EU needs to continue and step up its support. The war in Ukraine is directly linked to European security. Ukraine should become a member of the EU and NATO as soon as it fulfils all criteria. The European Union has to be prepared to enlarge.

1.2 Our Europe must protect itself

Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, the weaponisation of energy and food, irresponsible nuclear threats combined with growing tensions in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait are a wake-up call for Europe. The pace of geopolitical change is dramatic and the world has become a more dangerous place. In this new environment, Europeans need to protect Europe. The EPP will always stand with an enlarged NATO and fully support the strengthening of our alliance, including through Sweden's accession. Every European effort in the field of defence has to be embedded and coherent with NATO. However, our transatlantic allies will stand with us only if we are also willing to do our part autonomously. A strong alliance requires burden sharing. We also must be ready for any changes in our trans-Atlantic partnership and a scenario in which we do not have the support of the US to ensure our European sovereignty for comprehensive security. This also includes close cooperation with our European partners, such as the United Kingdom and Norway. Our citizens understand that Europe needs to do more in a world in turmoil. The EPP is the only party that has consistently shown its willingness to promote a strong defence posture in Europe, to ensure both

deterrence and defence. We are the political force that stands for a Europe that can defend itself, in line with the principle of strategic autonomy, and support those who fight for Europe and its values. This shall not prejudice the specific neutral character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States.

We need to establish three steps for European defence. First, we must ramp up our defence industrial base through more investments. The EPP has already championed initiatives of joint military procurement, such as the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act (EDIRPA) and European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP). However, we need to go further. Our focus must be on Defence Tech 2.0, combining the defence industry and the most advanced computer technologies. We want the next long term budget (MFF) to provide the resources to innovate and meet our military needs. Ultimately, we should create a Single Market for Defence. The EU should use the European Defence Agency (EDA) to provide financial support mainly to defence companies to standardise the systems they produce and encourage more joint defence procurement projects in Europe, as well as research of AI for dual purposes (civilian and military). Member States should consider giving priority to purchase military equipment made in Europe to enhance the EU's strategic autonomy and stand up to aggressors such as Putin. We will develop common European weapons programs under the EDA supervision in liaison with the Member States. Moreover, the EU needs common rules for arms' exports.

Secondly, we must work better together by utilising all available options in the EU Treaties including PESCO and its flagship projects, such as the project on military mobility which supports crucial cross-border military transport. We also need to establish a Commissioner for Security and Defence, who will better coordinate defence issues within the framework of EU competences and promote cooperation, as well as a Defence Council with defence ministers of Member States. We should also envisage the establishment of a dedicated EU defence budget within the MFF of at least 0.5% of EU GDP.

Finally, our long-term goal is to develop a true European Defence Union with integrated European forces on land, sea, cyber and air. These forces should complement national militaries, aligned with NATO's new force model, with a rapid deployment capacity of a permanent and immediately available force. We want to create a European Fund for External Military Intervention enabling Member States that do not wish to mobilise their armed forces for an EU external military operation to make a financial contribution to the collective European defence. This European fund would enable the full costs of operations to be taken into account and shared between Member States. Our collective action should also focus, in particular, in areas such as cyber defence and security of space. The EU, together with willing Member States, must tackle future European defence projects, in close cooperation with our transatlantic partners, including a missile defence shield, a European DARPA, a European Cyber brigade, a European nuclear shield and increasing production capacities for defence goods. We must also strengthen European cooperation of intelligence services.

1.3 Our Europe speaks with one voice in the world

In the new geopolitical environment, Europe can only represent its interests in the world if it speaks with one voice. Europe is strong when it is able to respond quickly and work with likeminded countries. Our ability to react to global events will determine our success. Europe has to become ready to act in foreign policy. We, therefore, advocate for moving away from the unanimity principle in the field of EU sanctions towards totalitarian regimes around the world and of the Single Market for Defence. We will develop a stronger European diplomatic

corps through the European External Action Service (EEAS). But Europe also needs qualified personnel. The EPP calls to replace the High Representative Vice-President of the European Commission, with an EU foreign minister and appoint a European Security Council comprising of the leaders of EU Member States and other European countries (including at least the UK, Norway, and Iceland). This Minister will closely cooperate with all national EU colleagues on our common interest, as well as intensively coordinate with the other European countries, in particular the UK, Norway, and Iceland. The EU has to 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 Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine and conflicts in the Middle East and the recent instability caused by the Iranian regime have already shown. The EU also needs a long-term strategy towards other key, strategic areas including China and Taiwan, Russia and Belarus, Africa, Latin America, the Mediterranean region and the Middle East. In short, we need to determine the interests of Europe, in order to have a coherent foreign policy, in which all Member States must be considered and their interests protected. Moreover, we need to engage with the new regional powers that are becoming increasingly important players on the global stage.

The EPP remains fully committed to supporting the negotiation process for a just, sustainable, and viable solution to the benefit of all the people of Cyprus, without the presence of foreign troops and the anachronistic system of guarantees and intervention rights of any foreign state. The EU should send a strong message of solidarity to Cyprus by assuming a more active role in trying to overcome the deadlock and resume the negotiations to end the 50-year-long occupation of Cyprus by Turkey and reunify the island, in line with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, EU principles and the *acquis*. The unacceptable partitionist rhetoric of Turkey for a two-state solution will never be accepted by Europe and the international community.

1.4 Our Europe protects its borders against illegal migration

As EPP, we are determined to guarantee control over migration and we do so in accordance with international law and in respect of fundamental rights. The guiding principles of our migration policy are humanity and order. We seek a halt to uncontrolled migration so that Europe's capacity to integrate is not overwhelmed. European Member States, not smugglers, must decide who enters Europe. First important steps have been made by the expansion of Frontex to 10,000 staff in recent years, the financing of an electronic and physical infrastructure to protect the EU's external borders, the new Migration and Asylum Pact at the end of 2023, and the closer cooperation with third countries, as is the case with Tunisia.

Despite a complete refusal by the extreme right to engage constructively in reducing migration and the reluctance of the left to reduce illegal migration, our priorities are clear. To begin with, we must ensure stronger external borders, with better and more rigorous screening of irregular arrivals. Entry at the EU's external borders must be comprehensively electronically monitored. This includes structural and technical border protection wherever necessary. We need as soon as possible an effective external border protection in place, otherwise we cannot exclude controls at internal borders. It is crucial to reinforce every measure against human smugglers and traffickers, break their business model and end their

176 impunity. We need increased burden sharing in time of crisis, better-shared responsibilities
177 as well as strong protection of human rights, with special attention to vulnerable people.

178 We want to transform Frontex into a real European border and coast guard: we will triple
179 Frontex staff to 30,000 and equip it with implementing powers, a higher budget to purchase
180 modern equipment and enhance its capabilities. We want to guarantee that Frontex officers,
181 together with their national counterparts, have the means to better protect the EU's external
182 borders.

183 The mandate of Frontex should focus on three priorities: prevention of illegal immigration
184 into the EU, assisting Member States to secure the EU's external borders and increasing the
185 return of illegal migrants to their countries. We will actively pursue an agreement on common
186 standards for monitoring our external borders and the funding that is necessary for the
187 implementation of these standards.

188 We also advocate a fundamental change in European asylum law. We are committed to the
189 fundamental right to asylum, but the EU, together with its Member States, must have the
190 right to decide whom and where it is granted. We will conclude agreements with third
191 countries to ensure that asylum seekers can also be granted protection in a civilised and safe
192 way. We want to implement the concept of safe third countries. Anyone applying for asylum
193 in the EU could also be transferred to a safe third country and undergo the asylum process
194 there. In case of a positive outcome, the safe third country will grant protection to the
195 applicant on-site. A comprehensive contractual agreement will be established with the safe
196 third country. The criteria for safe third countries should align with the core obligations of the
197 Geneva Refugee Convention and the European Convention on Human Rights. Both
198 conventions do not include the right to freely choose the country of protection. Following the
199 successful implementation of the third country concept, we propose to admit into the EU a
200 quota of people in need of protection through annual humanitarian quotas of vulnerable
201 individuals. This allows us to address both security and integration requirements in the
202 selection process and effectively refuse entry to irregular migrants at our external borders.

203 We are committed to upholding the fundamental right to asylum, while in parallel fighting
204 the abuse of national asylum procedures. Therefore, all relevant EU policies, instruments, and
205 tools, including new trade agreements, development aid and visa policies should depend on
206 the cooperation of third countries in the field of migration, more specifically on returns and
207 readmission of their nationals. Nevertheless, we would like to stress that considering the
208 current situation in Ukraine, we want to refrain from returning refugees to Ukraine at this
209 point. Tackling the migration problem at its core requires a new pact with African countries,
210 supported by a European investment plan for Africa, to address more effectively the root
211 causes of migration, foster economic prosperity and social development, and prevent the
212 brain drain of the younger generation for the benefit of all African people.

213 Labour migration has a significant territorial impact and brings both opportunities and
214 challenges to ageing and demographically declining societies. It is up to the Member States
215 to deal with legal migration how it best fits their national interests and to facilitate legal
216 migrants' inclusion and integration into society.

217 We need full Schengen admission for Bulgaria and Romania, lifting not just air and sea
218 controls, but also land border controls, as soon as possible. We need to repair the currently
219 dysfunctional Schengen Area, particularly by further strengthening EU's external border

protection and by preventing illegal migration to Europe, in order to realize a secure and completed Schengen Area without internal border controls.

The instrumentalisation of illegal migration is a hybrid war strategy that must be stopped and identified as a threat to national and European security. Member States must have the option to temporarily suspend processing asylum applications in the case of instrumentalised migration. We will not allow anyone to blackmail Europe.

1.5 Our Europe is determined to fight terrorism and organised crime

We will leave no room for terrorism and organised crime in Europe. However, national solutions alone cannot end international crime, we need European solutions and enhanced information exchange between Member States. In Europe alone, international criminal organisations earn some 139 billion euros a year, while Europol estimates that within the EU, only about 2% of criminal proceeds are frozen and 1% are confiscated. Human trafficking increased by 10% between 2020 and 2021, with over 7155 victims recorded, while the number of suspected traffickers rose by 12.5%. Drug trafficking is a major security threat to the EU, as according to the European Commission, nearly 70% of drug seizures are carried out by custom authorities at EU ports. Terrorism continues to pose a serious threat to our citizens. Between 2018 and 2022, there were 332 completed, failed, or foiled attacks in the EU. As the main goal of organised crime groups is financial gain, the most effective way to fight them is to stop their financial flows through strengthened anti-money laundering and countering terrorism financing rules. We will establish a reinforced illegal assets recovery system, with improved means of confiscation capabilities, strengthened cross-border cooperation and information-sharing among relevant national, regional, local and EU bodies. Terrorism continues to pose a serious threat to our citizens.

We will significantly expand Europol, equipping it with all legally available competences in the fight against terrorism and international crime and double its staff from 1,400 officials to 3,000. We will ensure national databases are connected with those of international security authorities to facilitate information sharing between law enforcement agencies and intelligence services among EU Member States. The work of the Joint Investigation Teams in carrying out cross-border criminal investigations will be strengthened and eased. It is essential to deepen cooperation with the United States and Latin American countries in the fight against drug trafficking. We must update and develop EU strategies on cyber security and enhance the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA) to ensure our systems, data and infrastructure are safe from cyber-attacks. We will expand the scope of the European arrest warrant and push for its successful application. We will improve the information exchange between counter terrorism authorities and Asylum and Migration Services. The EPP is equally committed to combatting the spreading of ideologies running counter to EU values such as human rights, freedom and democracy. Hate speech, disinformation, Putin's authoritarian terrorist propaganda, anti-Semitism and radical Islamism spread division and intolerance in our societies. We reject and combat such extremism and violent radicalism in all forms.

The EPP is committed to preserving a peaceful coexistence in European countries and societies: it is therefore not allowed, by any means, not the least personal or electoral, to protect terrorism against the judiciary, Europe civil peace is based upon compliance of the

law, and respect to the rights for everyone. We have a bitter memory of the Deep sorrow caused by nationalisms, radicalisms, and populisms.

1.6 Our Europe stops violence against women

We want women to live without fear of any form of violence. The 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 to be deployed in a Europol special unit to combat prostitution and trafficking of women and girls. Forced marriage, female genital mutilation and any other form of violence against women under religious or cultural pretext must not be tolerated. Figures on violence against women in daily life are alarming: one in two women has experienced a form of sexual harassment. Domestic violence is too often a daily reality. 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 families are reported to the police. The EU is taking decisive steps towards ending violence against women. We led negotiations to criminalise violence against women everywhere in Europe. This means that EU Member States are compelled to punish perpetrators of violence against women, including cyber violence. The Istanbul Convention on preventing and combatting violence against women and domestic violence must be fully implemented throughout the EU. Violence against women in the digital space must be combatted vigorously and the issue must be raised at all political levels to swiftly act 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.

1.7 Our Europe protects its citizens online and offline

The COVID-19 pandemic taught us some important lessons on Europe's ability to manage unexpected crises and it clearly demonstrated that when we are united, we are stronger. It also taught us that we need a comprehensive EU-level approach to preparedness and crisis response. We want to create a Preparedness Union through increased cooperation, peer learning and coordination, ensuring the EU and its Member States will be better prepared for increasingly complex, cross-border and multi-faceted crises that often occur simultaneously. We want to create a Civil Protection Union force linked to strategic reserves of food, water, medicines and medical equipment, in a spirit of solidarity, to support our Member States in time of crisis. Fires that destroy our forest and threaten our citizens are ever more intense. We also want to create an operational European Firefighters' force, to be swiftly activated whenever Member State are in need.

Online threats are on the rise. We must fight misinformation and disinformation that aim to manipulate Europeans. We will not look the other way as our enemies increasingly try to weaken our resilience. The share of cyber-attacks targeting EU countries has risen significantly during the last year. Cybercrime is no longer a footnote in crime statistics. The economic impact of cybercrime has doubled worldwide. Only an integrated European approach will make us safer again. We need a European Cyber brigade with clear responsibilities for external and internal security.

Children, among the most vulnerable groups in our society, are targets of criminals, both in the physical and digital world. Globally, one in three children indicate being bullied online. In 2020, 33% of girls and 20% of boys in Europe reported to have experienced disturbing content online at least once a month. Over 60% of child abuse material worldwide is based in the EU servers and much is produced. This is unacceptable. We need an action plan against child abuse, sexual exploitation, cyberbullying and cyber threats that may lead to kidnapping and other forms of violence. We need permanent and binding EU rules to prevent and combat child sexual abuse. We want to use all necessary instruments to protect children and to further strengthen the EU's actions on the Rights of Children. We advocate the storage of IP addresses for the most serious criminal offences, especially in the fight against child abuse in accordance with the requirements of the European Court of Justice, and in respect of the fundamental right to data protection. 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.

We support the updated proposed Directive which will harmonise criminal offenses of child abuse across the EU. Investing in awareness raising is key. It must include children and young people, parents and caregivers, teachers, policymakers and the industry. We must all work together to prevent these heinous crimes in the first place.

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 world GDP has fallen from 20% to 15%, while China's has risen from 7% to 19% over the last half century. In addition, out of the top 50 global firms only 6 are European, while 20 are from the US and 13 from China.

We must make our economy fit for new challenges. In response to the COVID pandemic, we launched the Next Generation EU, the largest stimulus package ever financed in Europe. Now the war in Ukraine, the heinous terrorist attacks of Hamas and the growing instability in the Red Sea put new strain on our growth perspectives. High inflation, energy prices and interest rates are important concerns for our citizens and the EPP will tackle them decisively. To do this, we need a policy that is not clouded by misguided ideology, but on solid factual grounds and social responsibility. We must balance different interests in our economy, society, and environment recognising the challenges of the global economy, climate change and the changing demographic realities on our continent. This is only possible if we work with creative researchers, responsible entrepreneurs and hard-working employees. It requires uncomplicated access to the labour market. It requires civic participation and a thriving civil society. We are creating the right conditions for this without ideological lenses, but close to the people and for them. We want to deliver a tax friendly and business supportive Europe where our productive sectors can compete and thrive, where our workers can obtain a good income and where everyone contributes fairly to society. This is the core of our economic policy.

2.1 Our Europe boosts its economic performance and creates good jobs

The EPP remains fully committed to the Euro, for it deepens the Single Market and enhances unity. 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. It requires sustained economic performance, economic, social and political stability, and sufficient freedom for entrepreneurs encouraged by a clear vision and long-term targets. It also requires fair and good working conditions, a skilled workforce, excellent innovative drive, an efficient, effective and accountable public administration at the service of its citizens and companies and fiscal policies that don't impose additional burden on them. At the same time, economic growth, competitiveness and the wish to create an attractive market need to also be reflected in European legislation and in concrete means and actions to fight tax evasion and corruption. We have to refrain from tendencies towards over-regulation without considering all three dimensions of sustainability – economic, ecologic and societal.

Above all, Europe's economic performance depends on a successful single market. Since the creation of the single market the gross domestic product per capita of France, Italy and Germany has doubled, while those of Poland and Lithuania, have tripled since they joined. We want to lead our single market into a new era 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. They need a fair playing field across the European Union, to flourish. 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. We must always consider the real concerns of our citizens and businesses, not to overwhelm. Legislation needs to be user-friendly, easy to understand and implementable. Proposed laws that are not adopted by the end of a legislative period expire and may need to be reintroduced if necessary. 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 responsible for SME issues and cutting red tape. To facilitate a more efficient use of EU money for projects run by public authorities, the European Commission will promote joint European public procurement for common large-scale purchase of services or goods, when relevant, and with full respect of subsidiarity. 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 and are bringing a real European added value, also taking into account legislation adopted across several policy domains. Cross-sectoral impacts should be duly assessed, including impacts to European security.

We welcome the appointment of the special SME Envoy and support the Envoy's work to monitor and accompany this process. 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 economic competitors, such as China and the US, while defending strategically important European sectors against unfair practices. The EU state aid policy must serve strategic sectors of the economy, based on the concept of

major projects that are of common European interest. We also want to define a “Made in Europe 2030” strategic plan following the example of the United States. The European Union has to set up an ambitious common industrial policy. During the past legislature, the EPP has been advocating for an economic security strategy – which aims at minimising risks arising from certain economic flows in the context increased geopolitical tensions and accelerate technological shifts. The EPP has also been at the forefront of advocating for the creation of new regulations aimed at safeguarding critical infrastructure. We want to further strengthen rules to make sure that strategic infrastructure such as ports, telecommunication and energy facilities as well as our most innovative companies are shielded from takeovers by third countries, notably China. Our general approach towards China is to de-risk, not decouple. In parallel, we must also increase the innovative drive of our economy by launching an investment plan for European quality jobs, through which we want to invest in research and development, calling Member States and the European Union to reach a combined investment of 4% of GDP with a focus on scientific excellence bringing European added value. Public resources are not sufficient to meet investment needs within the European Union. We need to succeed in mobilising more private savings. 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 and to promote competitiveness, we want to improve the supply of fresh capital so that our companies, including SMEs, can continue to invest in the future by having access to deep and liquid capital markets. This requires the completion of a Capital Markets Union and a Banking union, the strengthening of the internal market for financial services, as well as a sound and predictable fiscal policy that respects the Maastricht criteria. In addition, growth will be sustainable for us and future generations only through price stability. A sustainable economy also means that young people have a chance to effectively start their lives and build their careers. We will continue to combat youth unemployment, expand Erasmus+, especially to young people living in rural areas, and strengthen Discover EU in order to offer every young European a chance to travel across Europe and to discover our European and national cultures. We believe all workers should benefit from Europe. That is why we want to ensure fair working conditions throughout the EU, including providing a safe and healthy workplace. We need to introduce more limit values for hazardous substances to establish a level playing field for businesses. We need to promote labour mobility with a European Social Security Pass, by strengthening the European Labour Authority (ELA), and by addressing challenges concerning the posting of third-country nationals. The ELA has to take the next step to make a real impact for workers and businesses.

2.2 Our Europe creates prosperity with and in the world

We are the party of free and fair trade. European interests have to be always at the core of our trade policy, but 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. The EU's trade deficit with China has doubled in two years to a record €390 billion in 2022. We need a boost in trade policy, yet we often have to overcome the blockade of left-wing and right-wing populists. Our trade is about securing and expanding our own prosperity as well as safeguarding our strategic sectors and, at the same time, strengthening important economic-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 based on the principle of reciprocity, especially to safeguard the interests of our farmers and fishers. Our economy will never prosper in a fortress. We want to trade with the entire world, but also want to foster a special cooperation with like-minded partners in a Union of Democracies, to remain competitive vis-à-vis dominant competitors such as China. The western world must stand together politically and economically. No room should be left to dumping practices of third countries that undermine our efforts to reach strategic autonomy and higher social, environmental, safety or health standards. At the same time, we should intensify our trade relations with Latin America and the Indo-Pacific region with new smart and fair trade agreements. We also need to open a new, more intensive trade partnership with Africa based on public interests, skills development, strengthening prosperity, well-being, self-sufficiency, and democracy, as well as global dependencies on raw materials and energy. Our de-risking strategy must advance further.

2.3 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 consequences of the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine and the systemic competition with China, this is all the more important. We will invest more in the development of electricity and gas networks interconnections between EU Member States in order to create a more united and efficient energy Union. We will encourage investments to integrate further the European electricity and gas market to ensure lower prices for European citizens and our businesses. We want a European Energy Union that will lead us into a carbon-neutral and environmentally-friendly future. Member States decide about specific energy mix in their respective countries. An open and neutral technology approach as guiding principle is a driver for innovation. 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 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. We need a strong EU financial arm to back up our net-zero industrial and green ambitions for Europe to be able to compete globally, and to make sure this economic transformation leaves no one behind. 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. This necessitates further efforts to advance battery technology and battery recycling, as well as efforts to reduce the overall consumption of energy. Resources are increasingly pivotal in economic competition, since without them innovation is impossible. 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 for future innovations, identifying the existing resources worldwide, using them in 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. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and our former dependency on Russian fossil fuels have taught us some lessons: clean energy is not only good for the planet but also for our security. As we are moving away from fossil fuels, by developing a roadmap towards a resilient energy system with the phasing out of fossil fuels together with Member States, towards an electrification and automation of our economy, we need enormous amounts of

clean energy and to promote energy efficiency. We have fast-tracked the permitting procedures to really get the scale. We have reformed our Electricity Market to give priority to renewables and give long term contracts and improve investment conditions. We are using EU funds - REPowerEU- to mobilise close to 300 billion euros in resources. And we are strengthening the clean tech energy basis in Europe. Low-carbon energy has an important role in the transition to clean energy. We are lowering the marginal cost of energy throughout our economy. We are developing the home market for our clean tech industries. We are decarbonising and revitalising our energy intensive industries, to sell clean products worldwide. Thus, we are increasing our energy independence and overall sovereignty and resilience.

As the backbone that connects European citizens and business, transport matters to us all. We have no time to lose in preparing it for the future. New technologies have the potential to revolutionise the way we move, making our mobility smarter, more efficient, and also more sustainable. We need more technology – not bans!

The EPP advocates for a technology-neutral approach to developing alternative fuels, hydrogen technologies, new power trains for vehicles, aircraft and vessels. We support new sustainable liquid fuels, since they can be used with the current refuelling infrastructures and supply chains. At the same time, we will concentrate our efforts on streamlining the completion and development of the new Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) infrastructures, which are crucial for structuring our European territory and enhancing the efficiency of the European Single Market.

2.4 Our Europe prospers and protects people and the planet

Europe has a leading role to play in global climate protection. Our hallmark is the European Green Deal. The European Green Deal was born out of the necessity to protect people and planet. But it was also designed as an opportunity to build our future prosperity. In 2022, for instance, greenhouse gas emissions in Europe went down by roughly 2.5 per cent, while the economy went up by 3.5 per cent. We have successfully reduced our emissions while growing our economy. European businesses are developing new technologies and solutions. What they need to scale up, is predictability to plan their investment. And this is what the European Green Deal is delivering.

Four years ago, we set a long-term perspective with the climate law and the 2050 target. We shifted the climate agenda to being an economic one. This has given a clear sense of direction for investment and innovation and a clear steer for Europe to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050. As we enter the next phase of the European Green Deal, the phase of implementation, we will keep supporting European industry throughout this transition. From the Net-Zero Industry Act to the Critical Raw Materials Act. With our Industry Strategy, we are looking at the risks and needs of each ecosystem in this transition. The core aim will be to support every sector in building its business model for the decarbonisation of industry. Because we believe that this transition is essential for our future competitiveness in Europe. From wind to steel, from batteries to electric vehicles, our ambition is crystal clear: the future of our clean tech industry has to be made in Europe.

To achieve our ambitious goals, we must make climate policy go hand in hand with our economy and society. Because we know that 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. The green deal for us is not a new ideology as advocated by the greens or the socialists, it is the hallmark of the more prosperous, innovative, competitive and sustainable Europe that the EPP envisions. 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 carbon-neutral transformation can be achieved successfully through our businesses. It is important to support our companies - especially SMEs, our farmers and fishers - financially in the transition and to find the best solutions for reducing global emissions. We will only achieve the best solutions if we use all technological possibilities without any prejudice or ideology. We defend the principle of technological freedom in the implementation of public environmental policies. The EU can set targets for reducing CO2 emissions, but it must leave room for private and local players to find appropriate technological solutions. We reject a ban policy and instead opt for an open technology approach. We regard a policy of positive incentives much more effective. We are in favour of technological openness in the economy, energy and climate protection. Engineers, not politicians, together with the market, should be deciding on the best technology in order to achieve carbon neutrality. We rely on innovative concepts and market-based instruments for climate protection such as emissions trading, expansion of renewable and other low-carbon energies and a circular economy, including circular bio-economy. We want to further develop the Green Deal. We will always take the interests of our citizens and our entrepreneurs fully into account. All low-carbon energies are a key factor for successful climate protection. 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, creating the conditions to enable a functioning transport infrastructure, as already provided for in the EU hydrogen strategy. We want to intensify research in the fields of energy, climate and materials, and promote Europe as a research centre for innovative energy technologies, with a special focus on nuclear fusion.

To keep our policies ambitious but also realistic we intent to give higher consideration of the needs of cities and regions when preparing environment, energy and climate strategies and their funding. At the same time, we will promote a circular economy in order to utilise raw materials responsibly, 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. We will strengthen the European waste reduction strategy and the European plastics strategy, especially with regard to micro-plastics. We will implement a strategy for water and air quality at the European level and tackle the issue of perfluoroalkylated substances (PFAS). Climate protection is a common European challenge. We want the EU to become responsible for concluding international environmental agreements for the entire EU.

2.5 Our Europe boosts living standards in every region

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 than to leave

their country and their loved ones behind to find good opportunities. 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 their interests are taken into account equally. And our political family already does so: not only is the EPP the most represented political force within the European Commission and European Council, but it is also largely represented on the ground, at local and regional level, more than any other party in Europe. Through structural and cohesion policies, for example, we will focus on closing the gap between rural and urban areas. There should be no first and second-class citizens. We want to close economic, social and territorial disparities.

Regional and local budgets play a prominent part in supporting the national contributions to the EU budget and in co-financing EU projects implemented in regions and cities. Therefore, we have to elevate the needs of our regions and local communities when discussing the EU budget. Cohesion policy has a highly positive impact on the Single Market. It should remain strongly supported in the EU budget, but with simplified rules and with the direct involvement of regional and local authorities in the design and implementation of programmes. We want to improve the subsidiarity check also by assessing the territorial impact of all new EU legislation. We will promote a European plan for rural areas and to strengthen the EU strategy for Outermost Regions. 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, and civil society all over Europe. We want to ensure that innovation capacities, access to connectivity, online tools and technologies that support education, research and business, are available to all citizens, including in rural and remote areas, taking into special consideration the challenges faced by outermost regions. 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. At the same time labour mobility remains a cornerstone of a functioning internal market and of a long-term growth that boosts employment and careers for the people.

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

Innovation improves people's lives. Against the advances of China and the US, Europe has a globally competitive advantage: our common values, the social market economy, and political stability. As Christian Democrats and Centre Right, 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 at the service of the people by

making seniors more independent, and advancing research to find solutions in sensitive areas, for example, discover novel prevention strategies and treatments in health, to better counter climate change and avoid environmental disasters, improve mobility and make construction works more efficient and safer. Non-digital services should remain accessible for people without easy digital access, especially for the elderly. 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, the EU must be a leading force in artificial intelligence. 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 backing European pilot line infrastructure for semiconductor innovations 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 requires sufficient funding.

2.7 Our Europe stands by our farmers and fishers to ensure the production of healthy and affordable food for all

European agriculture and the Common Agriculture Policy meet the high expectations of society, in particular with regard to food supply, high food quality and safety, protection of natural resources, animal welfare and, last but not least, fair product prices for consumers. Food security is not a luxury, but a fundamental necessity. The EPP has always stood by farmers and fishers, particularly when living costs are rising for our citizens and food security and availability are on the line due to the many global challenges. Farming and fisheries are two strategic sectors for Europe. 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, a staggering decrease of over 60% as compared to 2016! We want farmers in Europe to have a future and stand for dialogue instead of top-down approaches. 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 farmers. Protecting biodiversity and precious resources such as water, air 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 Resilience Scoreboard to

better prevent natural disasters and make regions, cities and villages more resilient in agriculture and food production, and with a European plan for water use, reuse and storage. 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.

In recent years, fishers have faced successive crises derived from the impact of Brexit, Covid and the war in Ukraine, with the rise in fuel prices. They also face important challenges such as climate change, the decarbonization of the fleet and the problem of generational renewal. We are also in favour of a reform to the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), so that it also takes into account the need to face these and other challenges. Fisheries and aquaculture are strategic sectors. The EPP stands for creating a stand-alone portfolio on fisheries in the next European Commission. If that were not possible, the fishing responsibilities should be assumed by the Commissioner for Agriculture and Fisheries, as was the case in the past.

Our fisheries are crucial to ensure quality provision and reduce dependencies on imports. We should focus on developing legislation and financing instruments that strongly back the fishery sector in its transition towards a more sustainable catch. Monitoring and reporting of fishing activities may be necessary, yet the administrative burden should be reduced and rationalized.

The CAP 2028-2034 must have a stronger economic pillar and direct payments should serve to secure basic agricultural incomes and offer protection in volatile markets. It must enable a strong and competitive agricultural sector, and provide a genuine reward for the diverse services provided by agriculture. In addition, we must make sure that the CAP funding is distributed fairly both among and within Member States. Flexibility should be a key factor for the new CAP in order to guarantee the producer's income. European farmers produce the highest standards in the world and these standards must be designed in a way that maintains the competitiveness of European agriculture worldwide. We also consider that adequate and additional funding is necessary to facilitate our farmers' environmental efforts, incentivise them to operate more sustainable and help them face the consequences of climate change. We focus on promoting modern and sustainable agricultural practices and high-tech in agriculture. We want a European moon-shot for precision agriculture, integrated pest management, closing the nutrients cycle, and the use of robotics. Especially in agriculture and fishery, the ambitious goals should be solved with technological innovations, not with bans. Rural development should continue to serve as a stimulus for agriculture and the population in rural areas and ensure vital rural areas, including via better rural-urban synergies in terms of interconnected public services and boosting of local economy and local jobs. Particular attention should be paid to supporting disadvantaged rural areas, public research and innovation to develop alternatives to plant protection products. We want to accelerate the take up of new biotechnologies in agriculture as they can be effective tools against climate related risks. For us, agriculture and fishery are sectors of the future, and we want the younger generation to be passionate about this profession. Together with Member States, we want to ensure that young people who choose agriculture have access to land. We oppose excessive requirements and additional burdens for our farmers. And we have to further develop the European Green Deal by a better consideration of the interests of consumers and farmers. This applies in particular to issues such as new rules on the sustainable use of plant protection products (SUR), and unnecessary bureaucracy.

Large carnivores represent an increasing threat to farmers and livestock breeders and endanger traditional pastoralism throughout Europe. Therefore, we need new rules for the management of large carnivore populations, especially wolves and brown bears, including culling when densities reach unsustainable levels. Forests and the entire forest-based value chain are a crucial part of rural areas. Forests provide jobs, ensure economic welfare, store carbon, offer health-benefits and combat desertification. We believe the best know-how for sustainable forest management lies within the Member States, therefore we respect the Member States' competences on forest-related legislation.

III. Our Europe believes 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 more than an economic project 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 and we commit to promoting democratic values via education and culture.

3.1 Our Europe defends our European social model

Our quality of life depends on social peace. The future of Europe will be built with and by our social partners. Social dialogue is a core feature of our European social market economy and is key to decent working conditions and economic prosperity. 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. The European Pillar of Social Rights has been the reference point for building a strong social Europe. While it is in the hand of the Member States to run the national welfare state, it is Europe can contribute to the conditions for economic growth and prosperity to finance them. 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 ensure the rights of workers and the self-employed in the digital age, for instance in the gig economy, while respecting the competences of Member States and empowering social partners. We want to ensure quality jobs and fair wages across Europe and enhance collective bargaining. The fight against precarious working conditions, both at national level and across our borders to protect our workers from illegal working practices, is crucial for a well-functioning single market. Today's work models must 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 Christian social teaching has enshrined and promoted 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. A

fair Europe must take into account lower and middle class households. The cost of living crisis is threatening many households, young and old, has led to an erosion of the middle class and a growing number of people losing out in the single market. This has a negative impact on our societies and our economies. The heroes of everyday life must also be rewarded in the tax systems of the Member States.

3.2 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, 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. We will assess the possibility of creating a European Cultural Heritage Fund. We commit promoting our rich cultural heritage, which will also contribute to boost tourism in the European Union, a sector that was heavily hit by the COVID pandemic. As a response, the EPP led the key EU initiatives, notably the EU Digital COVID Certificate. Within the limits of EU competences, the EPP remains committed to bolstering the tourism sector.

Europe is diverse and nuanced but we have a shared Judeo-Christian culture and heritage. We also share the heritage of Humanism and of the Enlightenment. In the European Union, we respect the freedom of belief and conscience and thus the freedom of religion. We must protect our European way of life by preserving our Christian values and our fundamental principles. Democracy, human dignity, fundamental rights, including rights of minorities and of the most vulnerable, freedom, equality, equal rights for women and men, 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.

Over the past years, the EPP has been the leading defender of the rule of law in the European Union, making it clear that our community is based on values and that these must be respected, notably the EU fundamental values. Countries that join the European Union have voluntarily signed up to these values and there should therefore be consequences for serious and systemic breaches of the rule of law. The mechanism provided in the treaty has clearly failed to serve its purpose, whether as a deterrent or as an adequate sanction mechanism. This is why the EPP secured the approval of a new Rule-of-Law conditionality mechanism that ensures that EU funds would stop flowing into governments that breach the rule of law. The EU is not a cash-cow and governments that do not subscribe to our common values cannot expect to benefit from EU funds.

The EPP is strongly committed to remaining the leading defender of the rule of law so that all citizens in all Member States can feel equally protected from those who attack our values, including their own governments. The EPP will ensure that the Rule-of-Law mechanism is not only applied in a fair and non-partisan manner, but that it is refined to ensure its adequacy and effectiveness.

We will preserve our common traditions and convictions, our cultural richness and linguistic diversity represented by traditional national minorities. We continue the fight against all

forms of discrimination and, while fighting racism, intolerance, violence, hate crime, 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 by integrating themselves and by learning our languages and our values, 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, including by strengthening citizens' resilience, particularly in education 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. Putin's attempts to rewrite history and to distract from his crimes by spreading lies must be prevented and unequivocally condemned. We have to ensure a strong resilience of our citizens against any form of propaganda from the Kremlin or against any other foreign interference.

3.3 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 to everyone for starting a family and at the same time ensures that older people can enjoy longevity 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, young Europeans, parents and grandparents have supported each other. Family ties are the backbone of our community, and we want to preserve them. We will defend European social standards, raise living standards to strengthen families and fight child poverty. At the same time, 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 one in four households have children. We want Europe to be a safe home where new families can grow. We are committed to a Europe-wide parental leave, so that young parents can be with their newborn 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 as well as ensuring better quality of public services. 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.

Our Europe is a society driven by intergenerational connections and fairness. A society where all ages can thrive, young citizens, parents, families, singles, older citizens. Intergenerational solidarity is a cornerstone for our society, which supports exchanges across generations, including by volunteering.

3.4 Our Europe is a Europe for citizens of all ages

Demographic change will be a huge challenge in the coming legislative period. Strategic questions related to the labour market, innovation, healthcare, and regional disparities will have to be tackled. For this reason, the importance of this issue should also be reflected in the organisational structure of the future by an important portfolio and sufficient resources. The impact of demographic change requires collaborative efforts across different levels of government. The European Union can play a supportive and encouraging role here, including by means of appropriate structures and financial support. The European Union has to play a supportive and encouraging role here. For this reason, a Commission Vice-President will continue to be responsible for this cross-cutting task and will be supported by appropriate instruments, for example a coordinating agency within the existing structures.

An ageing society presents challenges, but we also see many opportunities. In an ageing society, we will underpin active and healthy ageing for all generations and further develop the "silver", longevity economy. 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, by capitalising on the longevity dividend and on their know-how and experience. We want to move from an ageing to a longevity society by empowering older citizens. Entire and equal involvement of older persons who want to stay active on the labour market, in political participation, access to culture, justice, life-long learning, and digital literacy and financial must be ensured. Empowering people so that they are confident in managing their personal finances is key. We want to ensure a focus on financial literacy, in a digital era, to strengthen our families and our society. In an increasingly digitalised financial landscape, we must also ensure citizen's choice between the use digital means or cash and the accessibility of financial services for older people. In addition, we want to invest in age-friendly, innovative and truly intergenerational cities and regions.

A key task will be to strengthen the European Care Strategy and to implement solutions for affordable long-term care for the elderly and other vulnerable individuals in all communities, and to implement a European Disability Card so that the rights of those affected are recognised and acknowledged throughout Europe. We are in favour of establishing a European Guarantee for older citizens, to ensure social inclusion and their full participation in society and the economy. We are all ageing and we care. Europe cares.

3.5 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, especially in rural areas.

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 and their interoperability, train the best doctors and nurses, diversify our supply chains and create strategic inventories 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 to double the EU's research and budget for the period 2024-2027, while setting a target of 4% of European GDP devoted to research and innovation by 2030.

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 evidence-based politics and regulations enables the development of the best innovations and medicine. 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, dementia, and Parkinson's disease. We will launch a European Cardiovascular Health and Diabetes Plan, including a European Knowledge Centre, as cardiovascular diseases are the biggest killers in the EU and 85% of the persons living with diabetes die from a cardiovascular disease. In light of our ageing society, investment in healthy longevity is the best way to alleviate the burden of ageing on budgets and to make our longer lives also healthier.

We know that physical well-being is not all there is to health. Mental health is equally important, as Europeans increasingly call 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.

3.6 Our Europe is fit for new challenges

Our Europe is a Europe that concentrates on the essentials, never loses sight of the big picture and always fights for what is important. Many Socialists 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 a 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 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 could 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. We will also keep developing strategies to improve the proximity of the EU to its citizens, involving civil society in this process.

We stand by the EU's accession promises and a forward-looking enlargement strategy for Ukraine, the Western Balkans, Moldova and Georgia. Every candidate country must also be

928 ready for membership: we should take intermediate steps and closer cooperation in the
929 meantime to put candidates in the best position to join.

930 We consider that all candidate countries shall be bound by the same rules on the way to full
931 membership. We do not want an endless process, but the accession criteria must be clearly
932 respected. Any decision must be based on concrete results provided by candidate countries.
933 We evaluate each candidate on the basis of merit, respect of democratic institutions, the rule
934 of law and the protection of human rights as well as good neighbourly relations with all EU
935 member-states. These are the minimum prerequisites for every state that has the aspiration
936 of joining the EU.

937 While acknowledging that the current political situation in Turkey rules out the possibility of
938 Turkey's accession to the EU, we believe that an upgrade of the existing custom union and
939 visa facilitation could pave the way to its European vacation and serve as a signal to a renewed
940 and positive EU Turkey partnership.

941 We have been standing by Belarusians in their fight for democracy and freedom for years and
942 we will keep supporting the people of Belarus and their democratic leaders in their fight
943 against Lukashenka's regime. Once the democratic breakthrough happens, Belarus should
944 also be able to enter the European path of peace and prosperity.

945

946 **IV. Let's build Europe together**

947 Europe is our home. We, Europeans, have a long history of standing together. From the
948 devastation caused by authoritarian regimes, we rolled up our sleeves, rebuilt our freedom
949 and united Europe. Together, we have made our incredible success possible. But nothing is
950 perfect, and everything can be improved. And that's what the next European elections are
951 about - what Europe will look like in 2030. As the EPP, we have a clear vision of what Europe
952 should look like in 2030. We want more unity, security and prosperity. To get there, we need
953 values and leadership. This is what President Ursula von der Leyen, the EPP Commission Vice-
954 Presidents and Commissioners, the EPP Group in the European parliament and the EPP
955 Members of the Council have shown over the last five years. EPP leadership has united Europe:
956 common vaccine, common economic recovery, common sanctions against Russia, and giving
957 hope to Ukraine together. We build bridges where others only create divisions. We have a
958 plan for a Europe that takes responsibility for all citizens, for our economies, for our families,
959 for our women, our youth and our elderly. A Europe that safeguards our planet, competes
960 boldly in the world, protects its citizens and always puts people first. **Let's make Europe a safe
961 and good home for the people!**
962