

## **Our priorities for 2025**

### **Boosting competitiveness, fighting illegal migration, and promoting security**

As EPP, we have a mandate to lead the EU. On both national and European level, we received strong support. After last year's European election campaign and the establishment of the European working structure, we are ready to deliver on our programme thanks to greater EPP coordination at all levels, and across the three institutions, European Parliament, Commission and Council. The world is in turmoil, marked by Putin's war of aggression in Ukraine, the evolving situation in the Middle East, an ever-more assertive China, widespread geopolitical instability and rapid technological disruption. Tech billionaires are increasingly chiming in on politics and extremists are dividing societies. As the EPP, however, we stand for a strong, self-confident and secure Europe that offers its citizens protection, a good home and a social welfare state that leaves nobody behind. Europe must set the right priorities now. 2025 is the year of delivery with bold and ambitious specific policy decisions towards a competitive, secure and strong Europe.

#### **I. Making sure Europe regains its economic strength**

The EU is a strong global power. We do not hesitate to use Europe's market power to ensure that Europe's producers and consumers, entrepreneurs, farmers and workers are not exposed to unfair international competition. We are in favour of global trade, but we shall not be naive. At the same time, we have to do our own homework. 2025 will be the year in which Europe regains its competitiveness.

- 1) **We are forcefully tackling excessive bureaucracy:** We will present an action plan to cut existing red tape and to avoid new bureaucratic burdens, strictly apply the "one in – two out" principle and realise a one-stop shop for businesses to dramatically reduce reporting costs. Small cosmetic measures will not help our businesses survive the competition. We need bold, straightforward and immediately implementable EU packages to cut red tape and bureaucracy across all sectors and for all sizes of businesses. Businessmen and women must feel the difference.
- 2) **We are launching a competitive and clean industrial deal:** We stand by the Paris climate agreement and our ambitious climate goals. To succeed economically and ecologically, we have to offer smart solutions, not ideological ones. We need a new European industrial policy that not only focuses on the big strategic priorities but also ensures each of our strategic sectors are competitive. We will strongly support our industrial core made up of the car, steel and chemical industries. To achieve this, we must implement a technologically open approach, including for the automotive sector. We must stimulate research and innovation further by eliminating legal barriers and enhancing freedom of scientific research. Europe has to become the leading hub in leading innovation in the key fields such as AI, tech innovation, circularity, E-Health, biotech. Rather

than curtailing it, our regulation and financial support should incentivize Europe's traditional leading industrial sectors to embrace new innovations developed in Europe. Europe has to lead the next innovation wave. Next to capital, services, workers and goods, research must become the fifth freedom of exchange in Europe. Investing in the diversification of supply routes to achieve energy security is also crucial.

- 3) **We are strengthening the single market: the supporting pillar of our economic power is the single market.** For this crown jewel to shine, we have to ensure a level playing field and put more trust in our own entrepreneurs and offer them the freedom to do what they do best: be entrepreneurs. We want to achieve this by establishing a roadmap to remove obstacles in services. We will work towards an SME-friendly solution on late payments. Finally, because the single market has to be capable of attracting more capital, we need an action plan for the savings and investments union and a roadmap to advance all three pillars.
- 4) **We are enhancing Europe's role as the leading force in world trade.** As convinced market economists, we embrace economic competition in the world, but this competition must be fair. Anyone who undermines fair trade with nationalistic tariffs, unfair price dumping, or non-compliance with sanitary norms at the expense of Europeans will face Europe's reciprocal response. We stand ready to accompany the Mercosur agreement - a flagship project for more than 750 million consumers - with measures that address the needs of our farmers and concerned sectors. We must offer a vision and a plan to strengthen the transatlantic economies and address unfair, non-market practices by China that harm our economic security.
- 5) **We are supporting our farmers and fishers:** EPP scored tangible success in simplifying further and reducing the burden on our farmers, notably with the delayed implementation of the deforestation regulation, and the outcome on the Nature Restoration Law. We will continue pushing for and supporting all actions to ensure that farmers receive a fair price for their products. Farmers must be rewarded for their efforts to preserve our ecosystem and not blamed. To that end, we will revise the unfair trading practice directive. We will also revise the wolves' protection status in the Habitats directive. Equally, with the leadership of our EPP Commissioner, we will work to ensure that our common fisheries policy provides a good income and a long-term future to all our fishers, in particular by securing sustainable and healthy marine ecosystems, which is the foundation for the long-term competitiveness of the European fisheries sector.

## **II. Ensuring a turning point in reducing irregular migration and ending decisively the smugglers' business model**

In 2024, our fight against smugglers showed initial success. For example, thanks to the EU-Tunisia agreement, the number of arrivals to Italy has been reduced by 2/3. In 2025, we are going one step further. We are committed to tackling the increasing

instrumentalization of migrants. Our goal is to eliminate the organised-crime model of the smuggling networks through five measures.

- 1) **We are accelerating the returns based on a new legal basis:** We will support the revision of the outdated return directive and replace it with a new regulation on returns within the next six months. In this framework, we will also support proposals for return hubs outside the EU. We also support the review of the safe third-country concept so that only security concerns matter, not individual wishes to stay longer in the EU. We will review our trade and development cooperation policies to promote third countries' cooperation and readmission.
- 2) **We are developing and adopting the Mediterranean Pact.** The EPP has already shown that reducing illegal migration is possible. For example, the EU-Tunisia Agreement already shows successful results with over 60 percent fewer irregular arrivals coming from Tunisia to Italy last year compared to the previous one. Until recently, we witnessed the same effect with the partnership between the EU and Lebanon with nearly no irregular arrivals coming from Lebanon to Cyprus and the reduced pressure of illegal border crossings on Greece's land borders also due to the cooperation with Turkey, noting with concern that the Western African route to the Canary Islands is the fastest growing, with record numbers of arrivals. We want Europe to conclude a new partnership agreement with Mediterranean countries and further strengthen existing bilateral agreements, e.g. with Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia, in order to boost economic cooperation and prevent irregular migration. We must drive the smuggling gangs out of the Mediterranean.
- 3) **We are setting the starting point for tripling the number of Frontex officials and equipping them better.** Together with the border and coast guards of the Member States, Frontex will ensure secure external EU borders. We support the conclusions of agreements with neighbouring countries like Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as key African countries like Mauritania and Senegal, for the deployment of Frontex standing corps.
- 4) **We are implementing the Migration Pact fully and as swiftly as possible.** With the Pact we have a unified approach to managing migration as Europeans to address a common challenge. The implementation shall not affect the exercise of the responsibilities incumbent upon Member States with regard to the maintenance of law and order and the safeguarding of internal security. At the same time, we want to improve it continuously by working on innovative solutions.

### **III. Making European security a key priority**

Europe is under attack. Putin's war crimes in Ukraine, disinformation campaigns by foreign autocrats, terrorist attacks, organised crime and hybrid warfare at our borders - they all have one goal: to destroy the European way of life. Freedom and security, the rule of law and defence belong together. We support the "security" priority of the Polish

Council Presidency under Donald Tusk's leadership. We as the EPP are the guarantor of a secure Europe, in all its dimensions.

- 1) **We are starting a real European Defence Union** complementary to NATO: We are committed to a strong NATO and also to the neutrality commitments of individual Member States. Within NATO and in strong collaboration with our transatlantic partners, we will significantly expand European defence efforts. We will support the work on a roadmap for the creation of the internal defence market. As a first step, we believe procurement rules should be made more stringent, less vulnerable to foreign interference and that financing should continue beyond this year, opening up new approaches to defence financing. We are committed to strengthening the European Defense industrial and technological base. Taking all defence spending by the Member States into account, our goal is for the EU to collectively reach the 2% of GDP goal in 2025 and be open to higher levels for the years to come.
- 2) **We are taking strong action against Russian hybrid warfare.** We encourage the EU and the member states to strengthen their countermeasures and protect their critical infrastructure, to counter an increasingly aggressive Russia. We welcome increased NATO presence in the Baltic Sea and call for tougher sanctions against Russia's shadow fleet that presents both an environmental risk and acts as an instrument for hybrid operations, such as cutting undersea cables.
- 3) **We are stepping up our fight against disinformation and digital information warfare.** We will support a Democracy Shield, including through pilot projects, to tackle disinformation across Member States. We have to implement the DSA in the sharpest manner, increasing the amount of EU-wide inquiries and investigations, holding tech giants to account for the promotion of content that undermines democratic processes in Member States. We advocate the rapid introduction on the platforms of privacy-friendly solutions for online protection, such as age verification of minors through secure digital ID. We should also explore solutions to end anonymity on social media platforms, leading to the spread of hatred, misinformation, and conspiracy theories.
- 4) **We are safeguarding the rule of law, in defence of our democracy.** Without democracy, there would be no European Union, and without Rule of Law, democracy would be impossible. We express our deep concern about developments in Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia and Spain. The European institutions have to secure the respect of the Rule of Law and the separation of powers in the entire European Union and react when those principles are under attack. In the same vein, we defend democracy and freedoms throughout the world. We therefore denounce the consummation of the coup d'état in Venezuela and the usurpation of power by the Maduro regime.
- 5) **We are launching a European action against organised crime.** Europe's open borders serve its citizens, not criminals. Organised criminals fear an effective police force and joint actions by state authorities to destroy their business models. We must strengthen Europol by enlarging its mandate and inserting

- enforcement and autonomous investigation powers, legally but also financially, by increasing its budget and doubling its staff.
- 6) **We are implementing a zero-tolerance strategy towards violence and crimes against children.** Protecting children is one of our key priorities, therefore we want to finalise work on a Regulation to Prevent and Combat Child Sexual Abuse. We will support the EU action plans against cyber-bullying and online child abuse and for the protection of the minors. To protect the minors better in the digital world, we need a Digital Fairness Act for tech companies to also take their share of responsibility.
  - 7) **We are strengthening social and health security in Europe, to respond to the demographic challenge.** Most of the European welfare systems are Christian democratic ones. For us, solidarity and responsibility go hand in hand. We believe in social market economy and we think it should be strengthened and better reflected in our single market. Furthermore, housing and demographic crises are becoming an increasing social issue for young families, the middle class, pensioners, and people with low incomes. Europe will only be seen as a home if its people have a chance to live in their own homes. We need an initiative for sustainable and affordable housing in Europe. In addition, health should never depend on how high the income is or where one lives in Europe. We must stick to our Beating Cancer and Alzheimer plan and launch new action plans on cardiovascular and mental health.
  - 8) **We are working towards effective policies against natural disasters** through prevention and action. Through natural disasters, climate change threatens our societies across Europe. Therefore, we must implement the necessary mechanisms to protect our societies from them, while we continue to work tirelessly to mitigate the effects of climate change and reinforce the European civil protection force and our emergency response.
  - 9) **We remain fully committed to a unified Cyprus.** The deadlock shall be overcome and negotiations to end the 51-year-long occupation of Cyprus by Turkey has to resume. The EPP remains committed to supporting the process for a comprehensive, settlement of the Cyprus problem, in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and in line with EU law, values, and principles. The EPP and the international community will never accept the partitionist position of Turkey to create two states on the island of Cyprus.