



For a Europe that is Free, Secure, Economically Strong, and Able to Act

An input on the future agenda of the EU and the European Commission's new work programme

Position Paper of the
CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group in the German Bundestag

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I. Introduction: Our vision for a Europe that is free, secure, economically strong, and able to act

The CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group is the pro-European force in the German Bundestag. We are convinced that we need the EU **as a guarantor of freedom, security, and economic strength** – now more than ever. Only with the EU will we manage to cope with the enormous challenges of our time, such as the ongoing Russian war of aggression in Ukraine, the conflict in the Middle East, systemic competition with authoritarian states such as China, economic competition with industrialised and emerging countries, climate change, and irregular migration, and to pursue objectives such as strengthening our cooperation with Africa and other developing regions. If, in the coming years, we want the EU to be able to successfully assert itself in a world that has become tougher and more complex, we need a centrist policy of resoluteness and reason, with less bureaucracy and more proximity to the people as defining elements. Such a centrist policy is what we want people to associate with the EU and its institutions. **We stand for a Europe that is free, secure, economically strong, and able to act – in short: a Europe that can do more and holds together.**

With this paper, we as the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group in the German Bundestag wish to provide **input on the future agenda of the EU and the European Commission's new work programme**. This reflects our group's particular

commitment to European policy issues and is intended as a contribution to defining what we consider to be a new phase of Europe's journey. Franco-German cooperation and the Weimar Triangle are cornerstones of our European commitment. In terms of **content**, we focus on **freedom, security in the broadest sense, prosperity and competitiveness, climate neutrality, agriculture, and a sound and stability-oriented fiscal policy** in funding and implementing EU tasks. In addition, we call for an acceleration of internal **reform efforts to strengthen the EU's ability to act and its capacity to absorb new members**, as well as a **reorganisation of the EU's enlargement policy**.

As members of the CDU and CSU, we are inspired by a **Christian idea of the human being**. In this spirit, we also want Europe to be a **family-friendly** place. Strong families are key factors in ensuring **social cohesion**; they are indispensable for a united and resilient Europe.

II. Our proposals in detail

1. Ensuring freedom and external security

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine marked the beginning of a new era. The changes we have witnessed since then make it necessary, first and foremost, for the EU to improve its ability to **defend our freedom and external security** and thus strengthen the European pillar in NATO – also with a view to ensuring fairer burden-sharing within the transatlantic alliance. The alliance obligation under the NATO Treaty, our transatlantic partnership, and the EU's mutual assistance clause form the basis for these efforts. They are our life insurance against any military aggression and attempts at blackmail.

For the reasons cited above, we demand:

- A **substantial strengthening of the EU's defence capabilities by creating a genuine Defence Union**. In particular, this includes **closer interlinking of national armed forces, coordinated by the European states and in association with our NATO partners**. We can build upon existing cooperation projects such as the Franco-German Brigade or our cooperation with the Dutch armed forces.
- Continued **support for Ukraine** with all political, economic, financial, and military means **in order to help the country defeat the aggressor, Russia**. We are aware that if Ukraine loses, Europe loses. Therefore, any investment into a Ukrainian victory, as well as into reconstruction and an EU accession prospect for the country, is also an investment into the long-term security of our entire continent.
- The **timely and consistent implementation of the EU's Strategic Compass**, including, above all, the establishment of the EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC) by 2025.

- **Increased cooperation in the areas of future capabilities planning, procurement, and armament policies.** The European Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS) and the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP) proposed by the European Commission are essential factors that will boost the performance of the European defence industry.
- **Better and more flexible access to funding for the European defence industries** to reflect the sharp increase in demand across all categories of equipment for European defence. Existing practices of defining investments into the defence industry as negative factors or even grounds for exclusion in funding schemes or sustainability assessments, including ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) criteria, must therefore be discontinued as quickly as possible. The European Investment Bank (EIB) should have more possibilities to fund defence projects. Incentives must be created so that private capital can help strengthen and expand a modern and efficient defence industry.
- That the existing instruments of **Permanent Structured Cooperation on Security and Defence (PESCO), the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), as well as the European Defence Fund (EDF) be aligned more efficiently and used more widely.** We therefore welcome the specific targets for European armaments cooperation proposed in the EDIS, such as the plan to meet preferably 50 per cent of the needs of the European armed forces with European defence equipment by 2030.
- That the **objective of improving European defence capabilities be given sufficient consideration in the EU's next Multiannual Financial Framework** and the **corresponding programmes be provided with the necessary financial resources.** In this context, it should be possible to prioritise short-term requirements of the European armed forces and their strategic partners.
- **More joint development and procurement at the European level** in the spirit of a genuine single market for defence equipment, so that we may close the capability gaps jointly identified and prioritised by the EU member states – for example in the areas of equipment, air defence, strategic airlifts, reconnaissance, cyber defence, space technologies, drones (land/air/sea), systems based on artificial intelligence, and the protection of critical infrastructure. This will help reduce procurement and operating costs and ensure interoperability. The goal should be to have one single design for all member states wherever possible. Existing cooperation projects, such as the Future Combat Air System (FCAS) and the planned Main Ground Combat System (MGCS) can serve as models to build upon.
- **A complete harmonisation of European arms export regulations,** so that the European defence industry can become a more reliable supplier of goods to appropriate third countries.

- The **establishment** of an **independent EU Council formation for defence issues**, with a particular view to improving coordination between member states to the extent that is necessary for a further harmonisation of European procurement.
- The appointment of an **EU Commissioner for defence issues with the sole tasks of promoting a stronger European defence industry and joint military development and procurement**, as well as **bundling activities to this end** within the European Commission. This would also give European armaments cooperation a public face.
- That the EU **facilitate and expand the promotion of research and development in the field of dual-use technologies**. This should be achieved, among other things, by abolishing the exclusive focus on civilian applications in selected segments of the successor programme to “Horizon Europe”, and by examining the possibility to establish a **European agency for research projects in the security and defence sector**, closely modelled after the **successful U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA)**.
- That the EU **increase its efforts to promote freedom, human rights, democracy, and humanitarian aid around the globe** – also in the interest of ensuring security. Promoting and defending universal human rights is part of the essence of the EU. The EU’s Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime (EUGHRSR) must be used in a more targeted and comprehensive manner. The EU must also do more to promote religious freedom. This includes providing the Special Envoy for the promotion of freedom of religion or belief outside the EU with adequate human and financial resources on a permanent basis. In addition, we must **empower the EU to protect our democracy against internal and external threats** and to **continue to resolutely fight against antisemitism**, and we must **strengthen its role as the world’s leading donor of humanitarian aid**. This should be achieved through better coordination of essential emergency aid, forward-looking aid schemes, and a closer integration of aid and development policy measures.
- Strengthening the **Council of Europe as an important institution to safeguard human rights** and successfully concluding negotiations on the EU’s accession to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).

2. Ensuring internal security and limiting irregular migration

To protect our citizens in Europe more effectively, we need substantial improvements and measures at the European level in the areas of **internal security** and **containing irregular migration** – implemented in a spirit of humanity and order:

- We are in favour of developing Europol into a European FBI and more than doubling the number of its employees (from 1,400 to 3,000) for this

purpose. Along with intensified cooperation with reliable police and intelligence partners worldwide, this will enable us to combat cross-border crime more effectively. Europol should be given all necessary powers, mirroring the competences of the European Public Prosecutor's Office. We want to strengthen the instrument of the European arrest warrant.

- **We must take decisive action to counter threats in cyberspace as well as hybrid interference.** We therefore support the establishment of a **European Cyber Brigade** and **increased defence measures against hybrid threats** (such as disinformation). In future, we must strive for a holistic understanding of civilian and military capacities.
- **We need to develop the European Border and Coast Guard Agency Frontex into a genuine border police and coast guard at Europe's external borders, entrusted with sovereign powers, and we must triple the number of its employees to 30,000.** This is the only way for us to monitor and protect the EU's external borders more effectively than before, in close cooperation with the security forces of the member states concerned.
- **We must ensure effective protection of the EU's external borders.** To this end, the EU must support the member states at its external borders with the financial resources they need to protect our borders effectively and set up necessary infrastructure.
- **For years, the threats of Islamist terrorism and political Islam have been growing steadily in Germany and Europe.** Our fight is against those who incite hatred and violence and strive for an Islamic fundamentalist order based on Sharia law. To them we say: **Sharia law has no place in Europe.** We must actively oppose any influence of foreign governments on European Muslims, mosque communities, as well as Islamic associations and organisations. This expressly includes financial support.
- **In the area of migration and asylum, we are in favour of an EU that stands by its humanitarian obligation to help those in need of protection but puts a stop to illegal migration into the EU and Germany in particular.** It is for the countries of Europe, not for human traffickers, to decide who comes to the EU.
 - **To this end, we need to swiftly implement the Common European Asylum System (CEAS).** The EU asylum reform is one building block in our efforts to reduce irregular migration, but it is not enough on its own.
 - **We therefore call for the introduction of the concept of safe third countries for asylum seekers, to be implemented in accordance with international refugee law and refugee protection.** Anyone who applies for asylum in Europe shall be taken to a safe third country

outside the EU, where their case shall be processed in accordance with the rule of the law. A connection between the applicant and the third country is not required. In the event of recognition, the safe third country shall grant protection. In parallel, a “coalition of the willing” within the EU should take in a yearly quota of people in need of protection and distribute them according to agreed principles.

- **Internal border controls must remain possible as long our external borders are not protected effectively.** In principle, internal border controls must allow for the possibility to **deny entry** to persons who wish to enter the country from an EU member state or a safe third country but already have or could have applied for asylum there.
 - **We want to harmonise standards for providing for people in need of protection as comprehensively as possible across Europe.** To prevent secondary migration, the possibility to submit multiple applications for asylum within the EU should be abolished, and social benefits should only be available in the responsible member state – also after the asylum procedure has been completed.
 - **We strongly support the conclusion of agreements with transit countries and countries of origin** in a “Team Europe” approach. This will be another strong lever that enables us to curb irregular migration and strengthen partnerships across various policy areas.
 - **It must be possible to place serious offenders and individuals posing a threat to public safety under arrest** until they voluntarily return to their home country.
- **We are in favour of the transnational introduction of a ban on purchasing sexual services across the EU.** The **fight against human trafficking** can only be effective if we work together and is an imperative for our European community of values. It is unacceptable that human beings are being traded like commodities for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

3. Securing prosperity through a strong, competitive economy as a prerequisite for a strong and sovereign Europe

In recent years, the European “Green Deal” has been a focus of legislative activity. With this deal, the EU aims to achieve climate neutrality by 2050, as set out in its climate legislation. The CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group in the German Bundestag continues to support this goal. However, regulations in the framework of the “Green Deal” haven not always taken sufficient account of negative effects on Europe’s competitiveness and economic development. Furthermore, the often overly prescriptive and detailed regulatory approach has proven to be problematic. Apart from the issue of ensuring security in the broadest sense, one equally important task for the coming years will be to sustainably secure our **prosperity. A strong,**

competitive economy is a prerequisite for a strong, sustainable, and climate-neutral Europe, and, by extension, a strong Germany. Climate protection and economic competitiveness must go hand in hand.

Based on this guiding principle, we need a **new strategy to increase the EU's competitiveness and innovative strength**, including the following points in particular:

- **In addition to the European “Green Deal”, we are committed to placing a stronger focus on competitiveness to promote growth, so that we may better achieve prosperity and climate protection at the same time. This is why we need a “Deal for Competitiveness”.** Among other things, this deal must include a **reduction of the degree of regulation. Necessary regulation must be designed and implemented in a practicable and affordable way** – together with businesses, the agricultural sector, and the citizens, not against them. This applies, for example, to the Taxonomy Regulation and the EU Buildings Directive.
- Within the European Commission, **a Commissioner, preferably at the level of (Executive) Vice-President, should be entrusted with coordinating and implementing a new “Deal for Competitiveness”.**
- **We need an EU-wide economic policy that serves the industry as well as small and medium-sized enterprises and ensures a secure and affordable energy supply while at the same time pursuing the goal of climate neutrality.** In this context, we bank on incentives, not coercion and bans.
- **We are firmly committed to the market as a coordinating mechanism and stand by the principles of the market economy.** Any interference with the price mechanism requires a sound basis. Such interference should be avoided wherever possible and must not be misused as a political instrument.
- **We are in favour of a transparent and practicable implementation of the European climate targets.** This requires an **expansion of the market-based emissions trading system** as key climate policy instrument. To achieve this, we must also seek international cooperation partners. Climate policy can only be effective if it is compatible with international endeavours. **We believe in innovative and market-based concepts**, including, but not limited to emissions trading, social balancing, expanding renewable energies, energy efficiency, and the circular economy. In addition, **we want to free up funds for investments into innovation in clean technologies.**
- We will **gradually harmonise the European Emissions Trading System for industry and energy (EU-ETS 1) and the future Emissions Trading System for buildings and transport (EU-ETS 2).** This will ensure clarity for reliable framework conditions and send out the necessary signals for investment decisions.

- We will **consistently drive forward the circular economy** and use **raw materials responsibly**. We want to close material cycles and improve the longevity of products. **With a circular economy for CO₂, we will open new business models** that we want to establish across Europe. **Achieving negative emissions through technologies for Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) and Carbon Capture and Utilisation (CCU) will be the only way to achieve climate neutrality**. To this end, we need a reliable framework and a Europe-wide CO₂ infrastructure. We will support direct CO₂ capture from the atmosphere by launching ambitious pilot projects and integrating the technology into the emissions trading system.
- **We must deepen the EU's internal market**. The free movement of goods, services, capital, and people is one of the cornerstones of the EU and one of its greatest success stories. It is what holds our economic area of around 450 million people together. We are therefore strongly in favour of making the **further development and deepening of the EU internal market** a central project for the future of the EU. This should entail **modern antitrust and competition laws that take account of the changed global situation** and are thus compatible with global markets. In particular, this applies to the areas of energy, medical goods and products, digitisation, telecommunications, transport, and the capital market.
- **We are committed to completing the Capital Markets Union in order to mobilise more private capital in areas such as security, defence, and management of the effects of digital, ecological, and demographic change**. We are prepared to make constructive contributions to **completing the Banking Union**. However, significant progress will yet have to be achieved on this path, including, among other things, concerning the regulation of government bonds, the harmonisation of insolvency law, the agreed funding of national Deposit Guarantee Schemes (DGSS), and the goal of achieving and maintaining low levels of impaired loans in the respective national banking systems. **We reject the idea of a communitarised EU Deposit Guarantee Scheme without preconditions**.
- **Approval procedures for so-called "Important Projects of Common European Interest" (IPCEI) must be accelerated and made much less cumbersome for businesses. The projects must be implemented in a way that promotes innovation**. However, global subsidy races are harmful and must be avoided.
- **We want to achieve energy security and energy sovereignty for Europe by creating an "Energy Union"**: Germany and Europe need a secure and affordable energy supply. We want to **strengthen the internal market for energy**, develop and expand cross-border infrastructure, and promote Europe as an attractive location for the energy industry by supporting research that gives no preference to specific technologies. We need a timely ramp-up of European and international hydrogen production, as well as a functioning transport

infrastructure including a cross-border pipeline network. We support the **ambitious and speedy implementation of the EU hydrogen strategy**. To secure our supply of hydrogen also by means of imports, we want to enter **more energy partnerships with reliable partners**.

- **We are in favour of giving SMEs a stronger voice in Europe.** We need a **European Representative for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises** with substantial rights and veto powers. This representative must be involved in all legislative procedures at EU level and be charged with supervising the examination of potential effects of EU legislation on SMEs.
- **We are in favour of less bureaucracy and less regulation.** We must identify and name the burdens caused by excessive red tape, particularly on SMEs, and finally reduce them in a verifiable, tangible, and sustainable manner. This includes a **binding action plan** that puts an **immediate stop to creating any further burdens** either in new or ongoing EU initiatives and ensures the **consistent application of the “One In, Two Out” principle** – i.e., the obligation to abolish two old regulations that are still in force for every new regulation that creates a burden. In addition, the European Commission’s Regulatory Scrutiny Board (RSB) should be developed into an **independent European Impact Assessment Council**; there should be **binding competitiveness checks** as well as mandatory **robust impact assessments before any regulatory proposal is tabled**. This includes an obligation for the European Commission to attach to each legislative proposal an overview of the expected consequences in terms of reporting obligations for companies and information on any new procedural requirements and administrative tasks for authorities, as well as to submit a solid assessment of the potential impact of the proposed legislation outside the EU. In addition, the EU **must substantially reduce** the considerable **bureaucratic burdens and detailed obligations that currently exist for science and research** and result from requirements such as the application of the “Do No Significant Harm” principle.
- In order to **improve the effectiveness of the EU Taxonomy and EU sustainability reporting**, we want to ensure that the corresponding **requirements be more flexible, more transparent, and more strongly geared towards the need of the market participants**. To this end, we call for **independent scientific monitoring and evaluation of the relationship between regulatory burdens and benefits**. We welcome the fact that the idea of a **social taxonomy is currently not being pursued further**, as social aspects of economic activity are difficult or impossible to measure and any assessments would be based on very different regional conventions.
- **In our policies regarding the circular economy and the regulation of chemicals** (e.g., regulations governing perfluorinated and polyfluorinated chemicals/PFAS), we insist that **a differentiated and risk-based approach always be prioritised over blanket bans**. Among other things, we need to set

limit values for pollutants at levels that protect the people and the environment while at the same time promoting a circular economy.

- **Public procurement must be made easier.** To this end, we must review and simplify all aspects of public procurement law. In particular, the threshold values above which a Europe-wide tender is required should be significantly increased, so that more contracts can be awarded in a straightforward manner.
- **We are strongly in favour of aligning the EU's trade policy more closely with strategic interests to promote mutual access to open markets and ensure security of supply. This also includes entering commodity partnerships.** The EU's trade policy must become more ambitious, more pragmatic, and more dynamic. To this end, negotiations must be accelerated, and **trade policy must not be overburdened with extraneous issues.** In our free trade agreements, we need a new balance between sustainability requirements, strategic economic interests, and geopolitical aspects. Our trade policy must go back to prioritising economic benefits. Environmental and socio-political interests must not dominate and thereby complicate negotiations of trade agreements and ratification processes. In future, free trade agreements should increasingly be concluded as **"EU only" agreements.**

Specifically, as part of a **new European initiative to conclude free trade agreements (FTAs)**, it will be of paramount importance to finalise the negotiations on the agreement between the EU and the **Mercosur** states, to drive forward efforts to ratify and implement the modernised trade agreements with **Chile** and **Mexico**, to resume and conclude negotiations on an FTA with **Australia** as quickly as possible, to consolidate **transatlantic trade relations** in the framework of the **EU-U.S. Trade and Technology Council (TTC)**, to conduct the ongoing EU treaty negotiations, e.g., with **India and the ASEAN states (in particular Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines)** on an equal footing, and to advance the prospects for FTAs with **African states.**

At the level of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the EU must consistently advocate for the **protection of intellectual property.**

- **As a democratic community of values, the EU must also live up to its global responsibility in the field of development cooperation.** The **"Global Gateway" initiative** has an outstanding role to play in this context. For a coherent and visible **external presence of "Team Europe"**, we also need a **more coordinated division of labour between the European Commission and the EU member states, closer coordination with the business community, and a clearly defined involvement of the private sector.** Overall, the EU should place greater emphasis on its own interests as it defines priorities in this area, and, in this context, **pay particular attention to its own neighbourhood, especially economic and social development in Africa and the Middle East, including a special focus on mobilising private sector investments.**

- **If we want to survive in the global competition, we must give science, research, and innovation a strong voice within the EU. Europe must bank on technological openness and competition.** Engineers, not politicians, should decide together with the market which technologies are best suited to help us achieve climate neutrality. **New cars with clean combustion engines** should therefore, in the spirit of technological openness and in accordance with our climate targets, **remain eligible for registration beyond 2035**, so that our automotive industry in the EU can remain strong and internationally competitive. Synthetic and renewable fuels play a crucial role in this context. Innovative drive technologies and alternative fuels should be promoted through an accelerated European fuel strategy. European requirements for air quality and emission standards must forcibly take into account cost efficiency, technological feasibility, and mobility requirements in cities and rural areas.
- **We need investment-friendly framework conditions for the pharmaceutical industry** so that the industry can produce more medicines and pharmaceutical agents in Europe again. We therefore call for **the creation of a European Health Union** and support **joint European activities for more health security and international crisis preparedness.**
- **We are committed to focussing more on research and innovation and to strengthening the European Research Area (ERA), the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), and the European Education Area (EEA).** We need **more strategic interdisciplinarity and permeability** between research instruments. The **EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation** must be further developed in a targeted manner and adapted to the **geopolitical changes**. We want **more basic research** and **more freedom for researchers**. We need **fewer detailed regulations**. We must invest more in **key technologies** to promote **technological sovereignty in Europe**. We finally must achieve the target of **investing a total of three per cent of the gross domestic product in research and development**. We want to **strengthen the European network of the SPRIN-D Federal Agency for Disruptive Innovation** – for example, by improving ties with the European Innovation Council (EIC) and corresponding national organisations in other EU member states. **Cooperation in research and innovation** must be **intensified across Europe**. This also means placing a focus on existing scientific expertise and skills in Central and Eastern Europe. Exchange and co-operation formats such as the German-Polish-Czech Science Platform should therefore be strengthened. In view of the changed geopolitical environment and global tectonic power shifts, we must pursue a **value-led “smart” approach in our international cooperation in science, research, and innovation, which is clearly aligned with our strategic interests.** The principle should be: **“As open as possible, as closed as necessary.”**
- **We must strengthen the EU in its role as a bulwark, beacon, and defender of scientific freedom worldwide. For us, freedom of research and**

excellence in research are two faces of the same coin. With this in mind, the European Commission must stand shoulder to shoulder with the EU member states and, together with value partners such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada, advocate a coordinated approach against all attempts by authoritarian regimes to influence the freedom of science and education.

- **We want to strengthen entrepreneurial spirit and start-up mentality in Europe and improve framework conditions so as to position our continent as a prime location for venture capital and start-ups.** This includes providing better capital resources for start-ups and young tech companies, especially in the growth phase.
- **We are in favour of a strong, competitive, and sovereign Europe in the digital space.** Europe must set recognised technological and legal standards, involving our international partners in this endeavour.
 - **Concerning the digital economy and technological developments, the principle must be: As much freedom as possible, and only as much regulation as necessary.** The past legislative period saw the adoption of several ground-breaking legislative proposals, such as the **EU Digital Markets Act (DMA)**, the **EU Gigabit Infrastructure Act (GIA)**, and the **EU Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act)**. These were major steps towards a digital single market.
 - The **EU Digital Services Act (DSA)** ensures Europe-wide standardised enforcement of the rule of law in the digital space.
 - We urgently need a reform of the **European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)**, and we must put an end to the principle of data minimisation. **Data protection must not be an obstacle for digitisation.** Furthermore, a **standardised interpretation of data protection across Europe** must become mandatory.

In the new legislative period, it will be of paramount importance to implement the EU laws mentioned above in a practicable manner, both at EU level and in the member states, and to achieve a standardised interpretation of EU law throughout Europe. In a second step, the effectiveness and implementation of the laws must be evaluated based on meaningful criteria. In a third step, legislation must be amended as necessary.

- Together with the EU member states, the European Commission must work harder to **further simplify, digitise, and coordinate recognition procedures and transparency instruments for vocational education and training** – also with a view to **securing the supply of skilled workers for our economy**. Strengthening vocational training systems in Europe is, among other things, an important **contribution to reducing youth unemployment**.

At the same time, Europe needs more **education in STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics)** at all levels of the educational system.

- **We are committed to ensuring that millions of young people can continue to benefit from the EU's successful Erasmus+ programme for education, training, youth, and sport. The programme is an important tool to help young people develop the international and intercultural skills that are essential for a strong European economy.** We therefore need to further improve access to Erasmus+ and strengthen the programme as a whole. We also want to **expand European youth exchange programmes.**
- **We are committed to creating new pathways for legal labour migration from non-EU countries.** To strengthen our economies and make the EU more attractive for (highly) qualified professionals and skilled workers, initiatives such as the EU talent pool and talent partnerships must be continued and expanded. At the same time, we want to stop the practice of EU member states selling visas and passports.
- **In times of major challenges, Cohesion Policy is a key instrument for strengthening competitiveness, innovative strength, and steady development across all European regions. This especially applies to rural areas.** It is therefore vital that particularly structurally weak regions as well as regions in transformation can continue to benefit from the Cohesion Policy even beyond 2027. We are in favour of keeping a decentralised approach, which means that the regions shall have a say in how programmes and funds are awarded.

4. In favour of efficient agriculture in Europe

- **We are strong advocates of an efficient agricultural sector in Europe.** Efficient agriculture is not only a **fundamental part of a strong, competitive economy**, but also a prerequisite for securing our food supply and improving our food sovereignty. In addition, we want our farmers to be able to contribute to securing the world's food supply even in the future. All of this means that **our agricultural businesses need special protection.**
- **We want to shape the future together with the agricultural sector.** We stand by our farmers. The **strategic dialogue** initiated by the European Commission should therefore be continued and expanded. The aim of this dialogue is to work together on finding solutions to secure the future of agriculture and preserve biodiversity.
- **We consider food security and reliable economic prospects for farmers to be priorities of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).** These concerns must not take a back seat to the necessary environmental and climate protection goals. The CAP must therefore continue to have a strong economic pillar

that takes account of farmers' earnings situations, offers protection in volatile markets, and enables farmers to run their businesses more sustainably while making a sufficient income.

- **We reject excessive requirements and disproportionate levels of bureaucracy in agriculture and forestry.** Examples of this include mandatory set-asides, impractical regulations for pesticides, and the regulation on deforestation-free supply chains (EU Deforestation Regulation/EUDR), which is hardly compatible with international approaches in this area and whose entry into force is to be suspended immediately until a new version is available that is suitable for practical application.
- We are strongly in favour of **introducing a moratorium on red tape for agriculture and forestry** and commit ourselves to ensuring that the training, expertise, professional experience, and local knowledge of farmers and foresters be given greater weight again. We need to show more trust in their expertise and their rational and autonomous choices.
- **We are in favour of lowering the protection status of wolves and other predators** and call for **the preservation of livestock grazing and pond farming** as important parts of agriculture.
- **We support the promotion of regional food production and the protection of regional foods through clear labels of origin.**
- **We are committed to sustainable and economically viable fisheries and aquaculture.** Only a sustainable fishing industry can continue to make its important contribution to our food supply.
- **We support investment in agriculture as a high-tech sector**, e.g., in the field of precision agriculture or the use of robotics and artificial intelligence. In order to harness the benefits of **new genomic techniques** such as CRISPR/Cas9 for food security, climate resilience, increased yields, and resource efficiency, **the European legal framework needs to be adapted without delay.**

5. In favour of a sound and stability-oriented fiscal policy

- **We are strongly in favour of a sound and stability-oriented fiscal policy in the EU.** We reject any softening of the debt rules within the EU. Like the national debt brake, these rules are necessary if we want to keep the EU's financial foundation stable.

We therefore call for **an EU fiscal policy that ensures**

- That the **financial resources** required to fulfil EU tasks be consistently **prioritised in the regular EU budget and the**

Multiannual Financial Framework, and that **expenditures be incurred in the framework of existing regular funds and used in a strictly impact-oriented manner.**

- **Better framework conditions for mobilising private capital**, also with a view to facilitating investments via the EIB.
 - **That there be no further communitarisation of debt and budgetary risks** within the EU. We strictly oppose any measures to this effect.
 - Strict application of the **new rules of the Stability and Growth Pact without exception and as early as 2024. The methodology for analysing debt sustainability must not create any new leeway for member states to incur debt.**
 - That the **European recovery fund “Next Generation EU”** remain a **one-time project**. We call on the European Commission to present a **repayment plan** for debt already incurred under this fund as soon as possible.
- **Price stability is an indispensable prerequisite for sustainable economic growth and the creation of secure jobs. We will continue to watch over the independence of the European Central Bank (ECB)**, which it needs to fulfil its tasks, and we will support the ECB in **keeping monetary stability as its prime objective.**
 - **We advocate that, in the EU Council, the German government only agree to the introduction of a “digital euro” as a supplement to cash if the German Bundestag has previously given a favourable opinion on the matter.** If a digital euro were to be introduced, private financial service providers would have to play a central role, and **potential risks to financial stability would have to be contained.** To ensure the necessary acceptance, consumers need to be certain that a digital euro will protect their privacy and be available at no surcharge.

6. Driving forward internal reforms of the EU to strengthen its capacity to act and to absorb new members; reorienting the EU's enlargement policy

We must **make Europe fit for the challenges of a world that is undergoing profound change by further developing its institutions both for internal and external purposes. Internal consolidation and reform of the EU** to strengthen its ability to act is also a **prerequisite for its ability to accept and absorb new members** – especially now that geopolitical changes have led to a new enlargement dynamic. The EU must therefore start doing its homework without delay to ensure that the necessary institutional development be implemented

before the next enlargement round. Thanks to existing “passerelle” or bridging clauses, this can largely be done without formal amendments to the EU treaties in their current form.

In particular, the CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group in the German Bundestag considers the following points to be **essential elements of any EU reform**:

- **A limited extension of qualified majority decisions in the Council of the EU** concerning specific foreign and security policy issues, such as the imposition of sanctions.
- **Streamlining the European Commission**: The formula for a limitation of the number of Commissioners laid down in the Treaty of Lisbon should be implemented as soon as possible – at the latest before the next EU enlargement.
- **Strengthening the principle of subsidiarity, including early consideration of the system of local self-government**. We need more Europe where Europe can do more – in other words: We need an EU that concentrates on those tasks that can be better fulfilled at the European level than at national, regional, or local levels. Above all, this applies to issues relating to security, migration, the economy, trade, energy, and climate protection. **A pro-European stance and consistent adherence to the principle of subsidiarity are not mutually exclusive**. When drafting **delegated acts**, which should only be used in exceptional cases, the legislator should define the scope and conditions of the powers delegated to the European Commission more specifically in the respective basic act. We also need a **better balance in the choice of the appropriate legislative instrument at EU level for each individual case**. For some time now, there has been a shift away from directives and towards regulations. This trend needs to be reversed. In principle, member states should **not go beyond a literal transposition of EU directives**. However, legally possible measures to adapt rules so that they meet the needs of SMEs should be fully exploited. The **European Parliament and the Council of the EU should be equipped with extended control rights** – including the possibility of withdrawing authorisations previously granted to the European Commission at any time.
- **Greater utilisation of the principle of enhanced cooperation** to enable, if necessary, a **greater number of phased integration steps and flexible coalitions** within the institutional framework of the EU. This is in the **spirit of a “Europe of pioneers” and the groundbreaking Schäuble-Lamers paper that introduced the concept of a “Multi-Speed Europe”**. It also means using the principle of “duality” in parliamentary control – that is, control exercised either by the European Parliament or the national parliaments of the member states. However, to protect cohesion within the EU, enhanced cooperation must always remain open to all member states.

- **The discontinuity principle must become binding at EU level.** As is customary in nation states, legislative proposals that have not been adopted by the end of a legislative period of the European Parliament should have to be reintroduced in the following period.

At the same time, **EU enlargement policy needs to be reorganised by systematically pursuing a gradual approach to integration – without compromising on accession criteria such as the rule of law.**

- **The aim should be to agree on attractive intermediate stages below full membership for those candidate countries that do not yet fulfil all accession requirements but are resolutely implementing reforms.** In its methodology of 5 February 2020, the European Commission has already provided for such measures, calling for “decisive measures proportionally sanctioning any serious or prolonged stagnation or even backsliding in reform implementation and meeting the requirements of the accession process”. However, the Commission has not yet made (sufficient) use of this possibility. Closer alignment to the EU via intermediate stages may include the possibility for a country to **“phase into” EU programmes and policies, e.g., via an associated membership in the Common Foreign, Security, and Defence Policy (CFSP/CSDP) without voting rights.** However, clear conditions must also apply to these intermediate stages, such as the full adoption and implementation of EU decisions under the CFSP, including the sanctions adopted in connection with Russia’s aggression against Ukraine. It is also conceivable that the EU might **grant observer status in the deliberations of the European Parliament and the Council of the EU.** This could lead to achieving tangible progress sooner in the rapprochement process – knowing that accession negotiations for full membership can take many years. Candidate countries need a realistic perspective so that they do not lose confidence in the EU, which might lead them to look elsewhere and align themselves with other players in the global competition between systems.
- **At the same time, each EU candidate country must continue to be judged by its own progress.** The individual national effort to fulfil all legal, economic, financial, and political criteria must remain the decisive factor. However, it is also clear that, for geopolitical reasons alone, the epochal change we have been confronted with since the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine makes it necessary that the EU and its member states increase their efforts to link the countries of the Western Balkans, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, and Georgia to the EU. The **Berlin Process** is part of this. Implementing decisions taken within this framework is the only way to improve cooperation between governments and civil societies in the Western Balkans.
- **As soon as possible, we need appropriate binding regulations and procedures for all EU member states and candidate countries that prevent unresolved bilateral issues from being instrumentalised during the**

accession process. Bilateral disputes should be resolved by qualified majority decisions, while issues pertaining to integration should be decided by the relevant European body, e.g., the European Court of Justice (ECJ).

- The current strategic challenges and transitions also make it **necessary for the EU to form closer ties with partner countries that are not or not yet seeking EU membership.** To this end, it is important to **fully utilise the potential of the European Political Community (EPC)** to connect like-minded countries to the EU. This is on our own strategic interest. However, the EPC must not become a substitute for the EU accession perspective of candidate countries.

III. Conclusion

The next five years will be about all of the above and more. **We want a strong EU that keeps its core promises: Security and prosperity in freedom and peace.** The CDU/CSU Parliamentary Group in the German Bundestag will continue to contribute to this effort and to actively, at times critically, but always constructively support the work of the EU.

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