

## **#Together in Europe – Together for Europe**

### **Taking stock of progress made on the work programme of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community for Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2020**

During Germany's Presidency of the Council of the European Union, we put into practice our motto for the area of home affairs: "Together in Europe – Together for Europe". In our Presidency we have shown, across all home affairs issues, that working together in Europe and for Europe is worth it.

#### **Living together in a strong society**

##### **Resolutely countering antisemitism and antigypsyism**

The fight against antisemitism was a high priority during the German Presidency. The Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany provided important impetus during the Presidency to make sure that, in the future, Europe pursues a comprehensive approach and counters all forms of antisemitism in a more structured way. The Council declaration on mainstreaming the fight against antisemitism across all policy areas at local, national and European level is one concrete result. The European Council, in its conclusions of December, welcomed the declaration, sending an important signal at the highest political level in the fight against antisemitism.

Furthermore, the German Presidency, together with the member states and the European institutions (and in consultation with civil society) held an exchange on the content of the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation up to 2030, which the European Commission proposed. This process highlighted ways to counter the spread of antigypsyism from a national perspective. Negotiations surrounding a Council recommendation have also been initiated.

##### **Bolstering disaster management and civil protection**

The coronavirus pandemic has shown that the EU needs to be better prepared for future crises. In keeping with the guiding principle of joint, forward-looking crisis management, we have strengthened

and further developed the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. Building on experience to date in managing the pandemic, we negotiated the amendments to the EU Civil Protection Mechanism proposed by the European Commission with the member states, brought about a joint mandate and started trilogue negotiations. In the context of developing a Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network, we moved forward with a structured review process, taking stock of what we have learned about crisis management so far.

### **Championing equivalent living conditions**

It was also a priority for the German Presidency to advance resilient, sustainable and balanced spatial and urban development. Among other things, we highlighted the distinguishing characteristics of European cities as a unifying cultural element of European identity. To this end, the New Leipzig Charter was adopted and enshrined in Council conclusions and will serve as the guiding document for sustainable and integrated urban development in Europe. The New Leipzig Charter focuses on orienting communities in Europe to the common good and strengthening their ability to act. Furthermore, we presented guidelines for the implementation of the new charter, identifying cornerstones for the further development of the Urban Agenda for the EU. During the German Presidency, we presented and adopted the Action Plan of the Partnership on Culture/Cultural Heritage as part of the Urban Agenda for the EU.

We also adopted updated common principles for spatial development policy in the EU as part of the Territorial Agenda 2030, which resulted in Council conclusions. The Territorial Agenda 2030 seeks to reduce regional inequalities and to strengthen social cohesion among people, communities and places in Europe. Six concrete pilot actions have also been initiated to implement the agenda.

### **Our goals: values-based digital transformation and equitable participation**

Advancing the digital transformation of European society as a whole was a priority of the German Presidency. To this end, we sought to strengthen digital social participation and place every citizen in a position to operate with self-determination in the digital environment and participate in shaping it, with awareness that our shared European values apply there, too. We want public administration to lead by example in this area – an approach expressed by the adoption of the Berlin Declaration on Digital Society and Value-Based Digital Government.

### **Our foundation: social cohesion**

In the face of the challenges of the coronavirus pandemic as well as increasing social tensions, anti-democratic tendencies and growing mistrust towards the European Union, emphasising the importance of social cohesion within Europe was a priority for us.

That is why we highlighted the positive impact of sport and physical activity on social cohesion, which can arise from shared strategic thinking in the areas of sport, schools, health, social affairs, urban

development and transport planning. This resulted in Council conclusions on promoting cross-sectoral cooperation for the benefit of sport and physical activity in society.

Jointly, we developed the EU Work Plan for Sport for 2021-2024 and determined the focal areas for cooperation on sport policy in the coming years.

Europe is shaped by migratory movements and migration. Integrating those who have recently arrived and strengthening social interaction on the whole are thus essential contributions to open and peaceful coexistence. We had intensive discussions with the other member states on integration issues. One of the focal issues was how to create lasting conditions to enable every migrant to participate more quickly in the social, economic and cultural life of the host member state on an equal footing. In this context we drew up a Presidency declaration entitled “United in diversity - promoting the European way of life together”.

## **Resolving European migration issues together**

### **Aiding vulnerable people on a basis of solidarity**

The current European asylum system is no longer able to cope with today's challenges. We resumed the important discussion on asylum and migration among member states and have moved forward on the issue.

Building on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum presented by the European Commission, we held intensive discussions in the Council, in particular on the pre-entry procedure, the distribution of responsibilities in a spirit of solidarity, secondary migration, the external dimension, returns and legal migration. We summed up developments regarding the core elements of the pact in a progress report, which forms a very good and solid basis for further discussions in the Council on an ambitious reorientation of European migration and asylum policy (in particular the Common European Asylum System, CEAS).

### **Ensuring an effective return policy**

We believe that a functioning and crisis-proof European asylum system requires an efficient mechanism for the effective return and long-term reintegration of those persons who are not entitled to protection. That is why we promoted intensive sharing between the member states and Frontex and negotiated the implementation of the Regulation on the European Border and Coast Guard. We drew up relevant Presidency conclusions as part of the discussions on more crisis-resistant return procedures in connection with the coronavirus pandemic.

### **Promoting legal migration**

Given existing skills gaps and demographic change, the European economy also needs highly skilled immigrants from third countries so that it can compete internationally. We held intensive and successful trilogue negotiations with the European Parliament and the European Commission to reform the Blue Card Directive. The aim of the reform is to attract even more highly skilled workers from third countries.

So as to bring about a coordinated resumption of visa procedures in the face of the coronavirus pandemic, we have drawn up a Presidency Paper and guidance for Local Schengen Cooperation, which will serve as the basis for further procedures once entry restrictions can be eased.

Legal migration and legal pathways for persons in need of protection are integral parts of a balanced migration strategy. We also used our Presidency to support the European Commission's aim for member states to strengthen their voluntary resettlement commitment. This is also a matter of improving complementary pathways, and in particular establishing and strengthening private sponsorship programmes.

## **Boosting cooperation with third countries**

Migration policy can only succeed in the long term if it is based on partnership. Therefore the new Pact on Migration and Asylum proposes a significant boost to the external dimension of European migration policy. The German Presidency supported this approach and put particular emphasis on strengthening migration partnerships. During our Presidency we also supported the operational Mediterranean Initiative and the Western Balkans Initiative. Further, we have deepened migration cooperation with North Africa and Turkey. The results were included in the progress report on the New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

## **Protecting external borders effectively**

In order to ensure more effective protection of the external borders, we moved forward on the rapid operationalisation of the new Frontex mandate and the Standing Corps, boosting these measures with concrete recommendations for action in connection with return measures.

In addition, we concluded the political negotiations with the European Parliament on the comprehensive modernisation of the EU Visa Information System (VIS). On top of the automated exchange of data with other EU security and migration databases, it will in future also be possible to retrieve, throughout Europe, information about long-stay visas and national residence titles issued by the EU member states.

## **Preserving and strengthening the Schengen area**

Our commitment to Schengen, an essential pillar of European cooperation and integration, was a prominent feature of our Presidency. So as to protect the Schengen area from uncontrolled entries across insufficiently secured external borders, we have advanced the proposal for mandatory screening. To support operational cooperation among the EU member states' law enforcement authorities, we presented proposals for joint cross-border operations and for increased powers for our protection at the internal borders.

As part of the concluded negotiations on the legislative process to amend the VIS Regulation, we achieved political agreement on the interoperability of central European IT systems and the link between visa procedures and EU databases. This is particularly true for linking the visa procedure with the other EU databases – especially with the to-be-established Entry/Exit System (EES) and the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), a move designed to boost security in the Schengen area.

Moreover, we have further developed and improved the tools of European police information exchange. In doing so, we paid particular attention to and had intensive discussions with the member states on EU information management within the framework of Prüm, the PNR and API air passenger data systems, and the EUROPOL information system.

## **Working together to provide security for all**

The security authorities need to be able to cooperate safely and digitally, and to ensure the safe exchange of information, even sensitive information, at any time. This is all the more true during the coronavirus pandemic. The German Council Presidency asked the security authorities in the member states about their needs. Together with Europol, it incorporated its findings into a Roadmap regarding Extending Secure Communications for EU Law Enforcement. The roadmap envisages a multi-annual plan designed to notably improve secure communications, including secure joint mobile applications that are compatible with national systems. The roadmap was adopted by the member states in December 2020.

## **Advocating for a new European Police Partnership**

We have identified the guiding principles of the European Police Partnership, underpinning it with Council conclusions. One of the political priorities to be achieved is ensuring that existing knowledge can be used more effectively through improved access and modern methods such as artificial intelligence, subject to clear safeguards as regards fundamental and human rights. Therefore, it has been agreed that the security authorities should at least enter persons assessed by member states to pose a terrorist or violent extremist threat in the relevant EU information systems. At the same time, every police officer in every member state should have access at all times to the information they need to fight serious crime and violent extremist or terrorist threats in a borderless Europe. The Council conclusions have also set the course for the future of Europol and for a more effective fight against organised crime.

Europol, the European Police Office, plays an important role in the European Police Partnership. As the central unit for sharing information, the agency supports and promotes cross-border cooperation among national law enforcement authorities through analysis, operational support and innovation. The EU home affairs ministers adopted a joint declaration on the future of Europol during our Council Presidency, making sure that the agency will be better placed in the future to support the national law enforcement authorities, for instance in the fight against organised crime or terrorist or extremist threats. We also successfully advocated for providing Europol with more staff and funds.

Another central element of the European Police Partnership is deepening operational cooperation among member states, in particular along the shared internal borders. This common goal was also laid down in the Council conclusions. Foreign police officers working outside the territory of their home country are to be granted balanced executive powers; the requirements for cross-border observation and hot pursuit are to be expanded and adapted to practical needs. Furthermore, operational EU cooperation between police forces in the technology sector has been reinforced and significant progress has been made through the merger of three European observation networks to form the European Surveillance Group and the establishment of the Heads of Lawful Interception Units expert group, in cooperation with Europol.

As regards cooperation between police and customs authorities, we have published recommendations for action to combat the distribution of illicit goods by post.

### **Combating terrorism and extremism**

Combating international Islamist terrorism remains one of the major challenges facing Europe, as the recent attacks in France, Austria and Germany have demonstrated anew. In a joint statement, the member states underscored our unshakeable unity and solidarity in the fight against all forms of terrorism. We agreed to improve information-sharing on individuals who are considered by the member states to pose a potential terrorist or violent extremist threat (known in Germany as “Gefährder”). In future, the member states will also review information on foreign terrorist fighters in a coordinated way and will enter this information into the Schengen Information System as needed. At the initiative of the German Presidency, 15 member states to date have provided central contact points for victims of terrorism. Germany’s Council Presidency also advocated for combating right-wing terrorism, violence-prone right-wing extremism and hate crime. We held intensive discussions of these issues in the Council and also adopted a Council declaration on them.

During our Presidency, we were able after three technical trilogues and three political trilogues to reach a political agreement with the European Parliament on a regulation to prevent the dissemination of terrorist content online. We also held a constructive exchange with the other member states on the issue of how to stop the lasting proliferation of terrorist content online.

### **Promoting deradicalisation and radicalisation prevention**

In an intensive virtual exchange among the member states, we further bolstered radicalisation prevention as part of a comprehensive strategy against terrorism and extremism. At an EU-wide conference with representatives of the policy, administrative and academic fields, as well as (civil society) practitioners, we identified and discussed future challenges for extremism prevention and ways to improve European cooperation and sharing among different stakeholders in this area.

### **Combating organised crime**

Combating organised crime effectively was another important concern of Germany’s Council Presidency. For this reason, we used a survey to collect important information on family-based organised crime and presented the results at the working level. We made family-based organised crime one of the topics of the European Crime Prevention Network (EUCPN) and conferred this year’s European Crime Prevention Award (ECPA) in this area. We also developed the EU policy cycle to tackle organised and serious international crime further by reaching an agreement on making procedures digital in a comprehensive way (EMPACT XR).

Germany's Council Presidency achieved our main goal in the area of drug policy through the adoption of a new EU drug strategy for 2021-2025. The new strategy sets clear priorities for security policy and modern health policy for the next five years.

In the Council conclusions on the European Police Partnership, we emphasised the EU Action Plan's measures against illegal firearms trafficking and called upon the member states to implement them.

In the area of cooperation between police and customs authorities, recommendations for action to combat the traffic of illicit products on the internet and the dark web – a joint Presidency initiative of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community and the Federal Ministry of Finance – were adopted by the Council's Law Enforcement Working Party (LEWP) and Customs Cooperation Working Party (CCWP). The recommendations for action focus on more effective oversight and cooperation at national and EU level to fight the traffic of illicit products through the postal system, between police and customs authorities of the member states, Europol and other relevant agencies as well as with postal and courier service providers.

### **Improving cybersecurity**

Together with our EU partners, we have further strengthened cybersecurity in Europe through numerous initiatives: The EU member states unanimously adopted the Council conclusions on cybersecurity for connected devices that we proposed. In doing so, the EU responded to the risks to the security of our increasingly digital society that arise from connected devices. Together we are advocating a higher level of security for the Internet of Things. We also reached political agreement on the proposed regulation to establish a European centre for cybersecurity and a network of national coordination centres. The European centre will distribute research funding for improved cybersecurity in the next EU funding period 2021–2027 and will create incentives for private investment in new European cybersecurity solutions. Our common goal is to inspire innovation and establish Europe as a leader in cutting-edge cybersecurity technology. The European centre will be headquartered in Bucharest.

In the Council conclusions, we emphasised that balance between technological developments and the needs of security authorities is necessary. Such balance ensures that the security authorities' ability to monitor telecommunications is not compromised by the advent of new technologies (security through encryption and security despite encryption).

### **Countering hybrid threats better**

Hybrid threats affect every area of government and society. Our aim is to counter this challenge actively and to boost resilience in a comprehensive and overarching way. During the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, we were able to derive our first lessons learned on hybrid threats related to the pandemic (especially regarding the identification and analysis of disinformation) and adopt Council conclusions on them. Among the things they show are the growing challenges to security, stability and the EU's shared values and principles, as well as the need to expand EU-level capacities to analyse and



recognise hybrid threats. We are pursuing a comprehensive whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach in order to protect our democratic societies and institutions from hybrid threats emanating from hostile state and non-state actors.