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MY FIVE POINT-PLAN ON IMMIGRATION

During my mandate as Commission President, I will build Europe's immigration policy on five pillars:

1.

Firstly, we need to **implement the Common European Asylum System**, adopted in June last year, **without delay**. No rules are perfect, and the new rules are naturally the result of compromise. However, they have the advantage of being able to put a definitive stop to 'asylum tourism'. Currently, one and the same applicant for asylum can have a 70-75% chance of being granted asylum in one country of the European Union and less than 1%, with the same reasons, in another country. It is clear where asylum seekers will go first, but this is certainly not a sustainable criterion for the sharing of responsibility between EU Member States. We therefore need the new EU rules in place swiftly to ensure an asylum seeker will have the same chances of being granted asylum in any of the Member States.

2.

Secondly, we need to **step up the practical assistance provided by the European Asylum Support Office**, whose task it is to support Member States under "particular pressure". It is no coincidence that this new EU agency and its staff of 70 are based in Valletta. What we now need is more thorough risk assessments to spot problem areas before they become overloaded. We also need tailored training for asylum officers in every Member State guarding an external border. And we need all Member States to work very closely together with the European Asylum Support Office, which can only execute its tasks if national authorities team up with it.

3.

Thirdly, we need to **step up cooperation with third countries, particularly North African countries**. To cope with the challenge of immigration, it would be naïve if Europe were only open and hospitable. Even Europe, as the richest continent in the world, will not be able to accommodate the distress and pain of the whole globe. We must not only deal with the symptoms but go to the root of the problem and help bring about change in the countries of origin. Nobody wants to leave their home country – unless the political or economic situation there forces them to go elsewhere. This is why European partnerships with North African countries to strengthen democracy and pluralism, the rule of law, religious freedoms and support the building up of stable economies are the best investment we can make to cope with the challenge of immigration. It is good that Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia are now countries our European Bank for Reconstruction and Development is operating in – a resource initially built up to support the political and economic changes in Central and Eastern Europe. Building up successful projects in these countries should get all our attention in the years to come.





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4.

Fourth, Europe needs more political determination when it comes to **legal migration**. I know well that this is not popular and often controversial. But we will only be able to cope with immigration if Europe adopts a sound policy that allows migrants to come to Europe legally and in a controlled manner, instead of by stealth, or by crossing the Mediterranean in unstable boats organised by shady human traffickers. Organising legal migration is also in Europe's own long-term interest. Demographic projections show that by 2060 the EU's active population will decline by over 10%, or 50 million people, whereas the numbers of retired people will increase from 17.1% to 30%, and from 84.6 million to 151.5 million. This trend poses a real danger to the economic productivity of the EU, especially because soon there will be two members of the working population for every person over 65, instead of four as it is today. From 2015 onwards, demographic shrinking in the EU will mean two things: one: we will need to replace pensioners in the job market, and two: we will need to fill new jobs created to serve an ever-growing number of old people, particularly in the care sector. We therefore need to develop a common legal migration policy to meet the increasing demand for skills and talents. The EU-wide "Blue Card" work permit, introduced by the EU in 2012, is a first step, as it allows highly-skilled non-EU citizens to work and live in any EU country except Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom. However, not all Member States have fully implemented the "Blue Card" Directive, and its practical implementation continues to be impeded by red tape at national level. Only 10 000 Blue Cards were issued in the first two years of the scheme. We will have to look at this again with a fresh pair of eyes to identify ways and means of substantially broadening this initiative. I want Europe to become at least as attractive as the favourite migration destinations such as Australia, Canada and the USA.

5.

Last but not least, we need to **secure Europe's borders**. Our common Asylum and Legal Migration policies will only work if we can also prevent an uncontrolled influx of illegal migrants. We therefore need to step up the operational capacities of the European border agency FRONTEX. A budget of just EUR 90 million a year is a good start, but does not yet equal the task of protecting Europe's common borders. We need to pool more resources amongst Member States to reinforce the work of FRONTEX and put into action European Border Guard Teams for quick deployment in FRONTEX joint operations and rapid border interventions. We also need to apply and vigorously enforce our new common European rules to penalise human traffickers. Those criminals who exploit the pain and needs of people in distress or suffering from persecution need to know: Europe is on guard and will bring them to justice at every turn.