<u>Resolution adopted at the EPP Congress, St. Julian's (Malta), 29 – 30 March 2017</u>

Preventing illegal migration to Europe

In 2015, more than 1.3 million people applied for asylum in the European Union, twice as many as during the height of the 1992 Balkan crisis (672,000 applications). According to FRONTEX, also known as the European Border and Coast Guard Agency, most applicants reached Europe by illegally crossing EU borders. In order to stop this uncontrolled flow of illegal migration, common action is urgently needed at EU level.

If we want to safeguard the Schengen Agreement, entailing open borders and free movement of people within the EU, we need to achieve an independent and effective safeguarding system for the EU's external borders and a common European asylum system. We need to be able to decide who comes to Europe. This decision must not be left to smugglers.

In recent months, numerous initiatives have been started at European level. However, these initiatives need to be brought together in line with an overall approach, even as specific measures need to be reinforced and implemented more efficiently. The readiness of all EU Member States to create one common European border management aiming to close illegal migration routes, to create one common European asylum system and to help the development of third countries in order to address the long-term, root causes of irregular migration must be of the highest political priority.

The following measures should be part of an overall action plan for Europe:

1. **Preventing illegal migration**

Europe has a responsibility to help those qualifying for international protection or in need of humanitarian assistance. However, assistance and protection should primarily be granted by the EU in the crisis countries themselves and in their neighbouring areas. It should be the European Union which — in accordance with international law — decides how many, and who, will qualify for protection within Europe. Uncontrolled access for migrants into Europe is not acceptable as it puts at risk not only the security of European citizens but also our whole democratic and social system, including the rule of law.

2. **Protecting our external borders**

The decision on who comes to Europe must not be left to smugglers. Based on the European Commission's set of measures to manage the EU's external borders and to protect the Schengen Area without setting up internal borders, it shall be ensured that illegal migration routes, especially in the Mediterranean, are consistently closed by a mandate extension of FRONTEX and EUNAVFOR MED SOPHIA, as well as by additional missions and in cooperation with NATO. In order to prevent the departure of vessels at the earliest stage possible, common patrols by EU Member States and Mediterranean neighbours should be further improved. Military forces of Member States should be able to assist in ensuring the effective protection of external borders. All necessary legal actions shall be swiftly adopted at EU level. Those who

cross EU borders illegally should be returned to asylum and migration centres in third countries, operated by the EU together with UNHCR. The EU should provide financial and technological support to those irregular migrants' countries of origin which are willing to help in the return policy, with the aim of facilitating job creation in these countries.

3. Creating a common asylum system within the EU

A prerequisite for a viable European solution is the creation of a common asylum system within the EU.

In third countries, asylum and migration centres operated by the EU and UNHCR shall be established based on contractual regulations with the respective states. In these asylum and migration centres, the respective asylum procedures should be carried out in compliance with European standards.

At the same time, resettlement programmes should help to take refugees who are entitled to asylum from the asylum and migration centres into EU Member States, according to defined criteria and taking into account particularly vulnerable persons.

Rejected asylum seekers should be returned directly from the asylum and migration centres to their countries of origin or to safe third countries, based on respective agreements. To this end, conclusions of EU readmission agreements must be intensified further with all important states of origin.