

David McAllister MEP

My Elbe-Weser programme 2016-2021

Tackling challenges - seizing opportunities!

I. Who are we? - What do we want?

My party, the Christian Democratic Union of Germany in the region between the Elbe, the Weser and the Aller, sees itself as a people's party that brings together Christian-social, liberal and conservative strands – based on fundamental Christian principles – while gearing itself particularly towards the specific culture and traditions of our northern German homeland, and developing them in the context of modern structural policy.

Our main political concern is the link between our region's traditional identity and the demands of a globalised world. As the Elbe-Weser party, we therefore seek to represent the interests of our citizens with one voice. Using this approach, we have achieved many successes over the past quarter of a century.

Although during the decades after the war the area between the Elbe and the Weser was among the structurally weaker areas in Lower Saxony and Germany, in terms of economic development the past two decades have seen dynamic development. I have continuously promoted this development by representing our concerns in Brussels, Berlin and Hannover with a strong voice and good judgement. In doing so, I have clearly distinguished myself from

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our political opponents, who wanted to leave our region's infrastructure at the level of the 1970s, and opposed any additional industrial and commercial development and all necessary road construction measures. For me, it was and remains true that creating productive jobs is the fundamental requirement for developing wealth and prosperity. I am committed to an active infrastructure policy as a prerequisite for any positive development.

Our concern is now to secure and build on what has been achieved – despite the difficult political environment and the major global and national challenges. Our achievements are threatened in two ways:

Firstly, the representation of the region in leading political positions in the regional government is unfortunately noticeably weaker compared to the previous government.

Secondly, many people now feel that preserving the status quo is sufficient in securing prosperity and fail to recognise that there can be no standing still in a globalised and increasingly digitised world. We therefore need additional active commitments in order to avoid falling behind the development of cities and other prosperous regions.

With our representatives and elected politicians in the municipalities, MPs at federal and regional level, the Parliamentary State Secretary in the German Federal Government, Enak Ferlemann, and with me as a Member of the European Parliament, we will make every effort to ensure the Elbe-Weser region retains its importance and continues to move forward.

II. The last five years – politics in transition – a challenge for our region

Over the last five years since the 2011 local elections, our country has seen significant political changes at all levels. The most dramatic event was undoubtedly the change of government in Lower Saxony in January 2013. With the elimination of David McAllister's government and election of the Red-Green regional government by a narrow margin, it was very much up to us, as the CDU Elbe-Weser, to call for the implementation of a number of projects planned and initiated in previous years, even in the new political climate. The change of regional government represented a turning point for the structural development of the Elbe-Weser region in a number of respects:

- Structural and economic policy is now much more firmly oriented towards southern and eastern areas of Lower Saxony, which supposedly have more limited future prospects.
- The importance of rural areas as a whole has decreased. In addition, there has been a shift of policy focus away from active structural policy towards the subsidisation of political desirable but often economically unviable projects.
- An active transport policy is no longer being pursued. Instead, existing plans are being delayed and, if possible, completely shelved. The coastal motorway A 20 project, the planning approval process for which should, as we have strongly urged, be launched as soon as possible and consistently pursued for all construction phases, is being delayed and blocked by the new regional government – particularly the Greens – against the interests of the people in the Elbe-Weser region. Following planning approval for the Elbe crossing on the Schleswig-Holstein side, the regional government in Hannover is called upon to also carry out the planning work on its side. The inclusion of the overall measure – as pushed for by us – as an urgent requirement in the new Federal Transport Plan will provide further impetus for the project.
- The agri-food sector – one of the most important economic sectors in our region – is so overregulated that many operators and farmers no longer see any prospects for the future.
- As the consolidation of regional finances carried out by the Wulff and McAllister governments has been abandoned, in future there will not be sufficient funds to implement an active infrastructure policy.
- There is wide and justified criticism of the introduction of government representatives. The regional government's aim of re-establishing the structure of the abolished district governments through the back door is becoming apparent. This will further add to increasing bureaucratisation. The result is longer and more complicated administrative channels with politically motivated interference.
- One example of the Elbe-Weser region being deliberately disadvantaged by the Red-Green regional government was the planned revision of parts of the Federal State Regional Planning Programme by the Ministry of Agriculture. By including large, in some cases populated areas with a view to waterlogging them as bogs to the detriment

of agriculture, the regional government has shown that it does not have the political will to strengthen and promote our region effectively. The weakening of the bog plans, part of which even included areas earmarked for the coastal motorway, following widespread public protests demonstrates the practical incompetence of the regional government.

- Due to its ideological blinkers and practical deficiencies, the red-green regional government has contributed to a situation where rural areas are no longer receiving the aid and support necessary for a balanced coexistence with major urban centres, something which was taken for granted under the previous Christian-liberal government. This can particularly be seen in the unsatisfactory use of EU grants, which has been – and still is – jeopardised by inadequate applications and missed deadlines.

The change of federal government, from the previously governing CDU-FDP coalition to a grand coalition, also heralded a new stance and a new direction in many policy areas – including for the CDU. The Elbe-Weser region, which until now has benefited from the CDU's consistent participation in important decision-making at all three political levels, now finds itself facing new challenges.

However, aside from these developments, which we will be scrutinising critically, I also welcome the implementation of many projects we had previously called for. The Cuxhaven offshore site, which I had always viewed as an important economic pillar of the future, is receiving a considerable boost through the recent decision to establish an offshore wind turbine production site. The positive development of Stade as an economic and power generation centre also helps to secure and develop the economy in the area between the Elbe and the Weser.

III. Our outlook on 2016: more Elbe-Weser in Lower Saxony

In the coming years, the success of our region will, more than ever before, depend on coherent cooperation between all levels – from municipalities, via the *Länder* and the national level to Europe. The complexity of the challenges, visible in the global financial and economic crisis

in the years after 2008 and the financial crisis subsequently triggered in some southern European countries, calls for close coordination and a strong German presence at international level. The CDU-led government under Chancellor Angela Merkel has also made unpopular decisions with real determination, and thereby resolutely fulfilled Germany's responsibility within Europe. The economic development of our country shows that we are still on the right track thanks to healthy economic growth, sound finances and a stable labour market. With the current influx of tens of thousands of refugees from conflict zones and economically weak regions to Lower Saxony, pressure is mounting on the regional government to enforce the existing rules on asylum with clear guidelines, i.e. sending those not recognised as asylum seekers back to their countries of origin through faster procedures before they are dispersed to local communities, and facilitating the integration of recognised refugees from areas experiencing civil war and crises and creating opportunities for them to have a fully recognised existence within our society and culture.

I would argue for a fair distribution of refugees within the European Union using well-defined quotas and allocation keys.

On the question of refugees, it remains to be seen over the next few years whether the federal, regional and municipal authorities will be able to develop a tailored approach to resolving the situation on the ground. The results of this refugee policy – more than any other developments of recent years – are being observed and recorded directly on the ground. The municipal level is increasingly taking on a key role in the areas of integrating and caring for refugees.

In the light of these new challenges, it is important to use the **local elections on 11 September 2016** to clearly take stock of the situation. The representations in the rural districts, urban districts and municipalities deserve and need politicians who are ready and able to take responsibility, and who take effective decisions on the ground, in order to face up to the structural challenges affecting rural areas and tackle the impact of global conflicts, the effects of which are being felt more than ever by us at home. The CDU's candidates are representing this aim in the Elbe-Weser region.

IV. Modern infrastructure policy: the basis of every successful economic policy

For me, the focus has always been, and still is, on a regulatory approach, taking our region out of the periphery and linking to the large economic centres of central and northern Europe. Modern infrastructure is the only way of generating economic growth that increases the competitiveness of our region and makes better use of its natural resources. Provided the right policies are in place, our region has excellent global and regional links, to Scandinavia, the Benelux countries, the British isles and overseas. The transport routes of the Elbe and the Weser provide ideal shipping potential into the heart of Germany – particularly in the new *Länder* – and to Eastern Europe.

Globalisation has meant that the international flow of goods has increased dramatically and will continue to increase. In particular, there has been a significant increase in container shipping. This trend is set to continue. In this respect, connecting the hinterland to the ports will remain the key task of infrastructure policy. For the Elbe-Weser region this means both opportunities and risks. As such, we continue to face the biggest transport policy challenge of the last fifty years. We now need to make use of the associated opportunities – economic development and jobs in the region – and to increase infrastructure so that road-, rail- and sea-based traffic do not collapse and instead are further developed without delay, in a coordinated way. In view of the increase in rail transport, environmental effects and noise control provisions must be properly taken into account when planning any expansion or renovation of the rail network. It is imperative that a sufficient level of protection against noise is included in the building measures.

In the meantime, some things have begun to progress: the construction of the first section of the A 26 motorway between Hamburg and Stade has been completed, as has the development of the 6-lane A 1 motorway between Hamburg and Bremen including the long-awaited Elsdorf junction. Thanks to the help of the regional economy, it was possible to make available the planning costs for the A 20 coastal motorway, enabling the plans to be carried forward swiftly.

In order to further strengthen the adopted strategy, I believe that the swift implementation and development of the following projects is required:

1) Road transport

- Planning and constructing the A 20 coastal motorway from Westerstede via the already completed Weser tunnel in Dedesdorf and Bremervörde to the planned Elbe crossing at Drochtersen, where it connects to the A 26;
- Swift progress and completion of the construction of the A 26 motorway from Hamburg to Drochtersen via Stade and completion of the stretch to Neu Wulmstorf by 2020 and to Hamburg by 2022; planning and construction of the A 7 as far as the A 1 at Stillhorn;
- Construction of the Elbe tunnel at the Elbe crossing at Drochtersen to begin in 2020 at the latest;
- Construction of the Bremervörde section to begin in 2018 at the latest;
- Extension of the A 281 including a further Weser tunnel connecting to Bremen airport and the Bremen industrial park;
- Construction of a 27 motorway exit at Achim-West between Bremer Kreuz and Achim;
- Construction of various bypasses (particularly Ritterhude, Cadenberge, Zeven and Ovelgönne/Ketzendorf);
- Reconstruction/restoration of various road bridges (e.g. Ostebrücke in Hechthausen, Ostebrücke in Bremervörde, Estebücke in Buxtehude, Allerstrom- and Allerflutbrücke in Verden).

2) Rail transport

- Taking advantage of the potential for cooperation between Deutsche Bahn AG and non state-owned railway companies with a view to increasing the attractiveness of local passenger rail transport and developing an efficient freight transport infrastructure;
- Extension of the Bremerhaven-Bremen-Hannover rail link and construction of a third track on the Hamburg-Hannover railway line between Lüneburg and Uelzen, and dualling of Uelzen-Stendal stretch in order to reduce the burden on the port hinterland area;

- Development of Hamburg-Harburg and Bremen rail hubs;
- Dualling of the Rotenburg-Verden stretch of line, including EVB's Rotenburger curve;
- Upgrading the capacity of the Bremen-Wunstorf line;
- Dualling of Nienburg-Minden railway line;
- Following a transparent planning process, in the medium term, construction of the "Alpha-Variante Plus" to relieve the burden on and improve hinterland connections from the port by extending the Bremen-Soltau America Line;
- Further improving public transport between the centres of the metropolitan areas of Hamburg and Bremen and the surrounding region. Good examples include the introduction of the Metronom, the partial realisation of the requested extension of the Hamburg urban railway from Stade to Cuxhaven, the launch of the North Sea railway between Bremerhaven and Cuxhaven in 2010, the introduction of the Bremen/Niedersachsen Regio urban railway, as well as the extension of line 4 of the Bremen tramway to Lilienthal-Falkenberg;
- Extension of connections between neighbouring authorities in the Elbe-Weser region and the Hamburg Transport Association (HVV);
- Creation of non-level railway crossings;
- In the case of development exclusively benefiting goods transport, the share of the cost borne by municipalities should be limited.

3) Ports and shipping

- Expansion of the port handling capacities in Bremerhaven, Cuxhaven and Stade and examination of further possibilities for expanding the ports as offshore-base ports, multifunctional ports and multipurpose transshipment ports. The new Siemens site in Cuxhaven is evidence of a successful structural policy;
- Support for deepening the Outer Elbe and Outer Weser channels for economic reasons. We will only consider deepening the Lower Elbe and the Lower Weser, however, if the necessary conditions of dyke safety and ecology are taken into account and an agreement is reached between the federal government and the *Länder* on the concerns of water management and land cultivation;
- Development of North Sea-Baltic Sea canal;

- Development of the mid Weser river for large cargo vessels and two-tier transport;
- Development of the Stade-Bützfleth industrial port by constructing a separate coal wharf for the planned high-efficiency coal power station and creating a new logistics hub by building a new industrial platform at the existing industrial railway station.

4) Air transport

- Development of regional airfields, in so far as this makes economic sense and does not compromise the overall vision for North German air traffic.

In this connection, regional transport policy should be brought together within an overall plan and facilitate links with the main urban centres. With this in mind, cooperation with the city states of Hamburg and Bremen is particularly important.

V. Innovative economy creates and secures employment!

Good and future-proof interconnections with long-distance transport networks are essential in order to address the existing disadvantages in rural areas. To ensure the Elbe-Weser region remains an attractive place to live, it is necessary to boost the regional economy. For it is precisely the local economy, characterised as it is by mid-sized enterprises, that creates and secures jobs and training *in the region, for the region!*

Regarding the development prospects in the Elbe-Weser region, *six* priority developments are envisaged:

1. Depending on geographical, geological, historical, demographic, transport and industry-specific factors, many locations in our area have huge growth potential and opportunities for welcoming relocating businesses. Through our policies, I wish to actively contribute to further strengthening these strengths (e.g. at the CFK Valley in Stade, the further expansion of renewable energies, the creation of additional logistical capacities, at the animal reproduction and marketing centres in Verden and

Bremervörde or in the further development of the North Sea tourism in Cuxhaven). The geographical location of the Elbe-Weser region, with its proximity to the coast and particularly the ports that are important for North Germany, has made our region especially attractive for the offshore wind energy sector. Lower Saxony in general and the Elbe-Weser region in particular are "energy regions", not only in the area of conventional energy generation but also for renewable energy generation. The location of the new offshore production facilities in Cuxhaven can only be seen as a step towards establishing this industry in our region.

2. In addition, for many local authorities, particularly locations with no direct connection to interregional transport routes, economic prosperity must come predominantly from the development of existing medium-sized structures. With our policy we wish to make an active contribution to maintaining the variety of medium-sized enterprises and thereby the range of jobs.
3. We are also threatened by skilled labour shortages. While we can create a positive environment for companies, it takes motivated and highly skilled workers to fill it with life and ultimately make it the desired economic success. Training and retraining workers in the Elbe-Weser region is therefore an important challenge for the economic development of our region. This will also involve asking questions about work-life balance even more than has previously been the case. It must be possible for the employees of a company to combine life and work, without unduly neglecting children and family.
4. With good internet connections, rural locations will in future also be able to create additional potential as a location for sectors where location is flexible.
5. In addition to innovations in the high-tech sector, low-threshold innovations with direct application are also worth supporting. Of particular importance in this respect is innovation potential that is not tapped by individual actors but rather developed by a critical mass of companies and research institutes. Only in this situation can network structures emerge along the value chain and spread far beyond the region.

A classic example of this is the CFK Valley in Stade, in the area of carbon fibre reinforced plastics (CFRP, or CFK in German): starting with the research activities of the aircraft construction industry in Stade, over time a technology centre, a service centre, a training centre, a technical college and a research centre have also sprung up focusing on CFRP as a material. After an initial focus on aircraft manufacturing, the focus of the application has since expanded to include the entire mobility industry (cars, lorries, waterborne transport, etc.) and also, for example, the promising field of wind energy.

6. In the framework of a balanced energy mix, I am particularly committed to firmly supporting technological development in the field of renewable energy production, such as wind energy, or new technologies for storing energy. In doing so, I am conscious that the development of renewable energy is very complex and requires a lot of space. Given that renewable energies are not produced everywhere they are consumed, we need a comprehensive redistribution network in order to supply our country. I will have to explain to the inhabitants of the Elbe-Weser region that this will require significant amounts of investment and that our rural areas will change.

As a key technology in the energy transition, wind-hydrogen is a major opportunity for the Elbe-Weser region, in particular the opportunities for cavern-based storage e.g. in Ohrensen. It is necessary to pursue efforts to bring hydrogen technology to market and to simplify approval procedures. Biogas production is particularly important in our region. It is therefore necessary to give timely consideration to making use of existing facilities after their subsidy period has ended.

The subject of energy also entails promoting and developing new forms of propulsion. This applies to both large-scale goods transport and individual transport. In recent years, the electric car appears to have emerged as a potential "innovative form of propulsion" of the future, as a supplement to fossil-fuel propulsion. However, the electric car will only become accepted if the necessary infrastructure for powering vehicles is also available. I therefore encourage the municipalities to make it possible to charge electric vehicles in appropriate locations (stations, park & rides, city

centres), thereby making it easier for drivers to switch to this kind of car. I personally reject subsidies for buying electric cars for public policy reasons.

There are also a number of new challenges with regard to propulsion for ships, which as of recently may no longer operate using conventional heavy fuel oil in the SECA in the North Sea and the Baltic. Vessels travelling in these waters are therefore now being powered by LNG engines. Converting our ports to enable vessels with LNG engines to refuel offers a great opportunity to make them an even more attractive port of call.

Active economic and structural policy requires a reliable framework across the board. Therefore, I advocate:

- ensuring that approval procedures for establishing industrial projects and business start-ups are quick and not hindered by red tape,
- making new attractive and needs-oriented sites available for businesses at suitable locations across all districts in the Elbe-Weser region,
- Ensuring that public administrations operate efficiently and close to the public, and that investment projects are promoted rather than impeded,
- organising supply and disposal systems in a way that keeps charges to a minimum,
- pursuing an active economic development policy. For that purpose it is necessary to promote the region as a whole, beyond our own area. The districts are invited to further develop appropriate concepts,
- strengthening cross-Länder initiatives, such as the metropolitan regions of Hamburg and Bremen/Oldenburg, the Süderelbe growth initiative with the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg or Bremen-Lower Saxony inter-municipal association. Here it is important to ensure that the "give and take" between the metropolitan area and surrounding municipalities is consistently balanced and that the benefits of these initiatives outweigh the costs in the long term,
- carrying out private-public-partnership (PPP) projects (such as the completed reconstruction of the prison in Bremervörde and various newly built schools) as an example of long-term cooperation between the public authorities and private industry in suitable infrastructure and building projects,

- for the federal and regional governments in future to be involved in funding the particular costs of converting abandoned army sites in the municipalities in a way that favours structure,
- avoiding unnecessary prestige projects and taking greater account of co-payments and subsequent costs when requesting subsidies, in order to consolidate public finances,
- ensuring that the tax burden for companies does not weaken competitiveness, notwithstanding the important role of secure financing for districts and municipalities,
- further strengthening the universities in the Elbe-Weser region and advertising for the establishment of new disciplines, for example for engineering-related jobs,
- promoting company nurseries and afternoon childcare/education in a way that does not unduly restrict parents' working life, and making private and municipal nurseries' opening hours more flexible, so that children can be cared for during different working hours.

VI. Digitalisation – already driving modern societies

While the development of the internet was long seen simply as one factor in the regional economy or as an advantage in zoning residential areas, primarily for young families, the digitalisation of our lives now constitutes one of the most important social challenges that policies must tackle. It is no coincidence that this issue is at the heart of policy-making at both *Bundesland* and federal level. It is currently promoted at European level by Germany's European Commissioner, Günther Oettinger (CDU).

Today's information society means that modern infrastructure policy in the Elbe-Weser region must include IT infrastructure improvements: efficient broadband data networks are a fundamental requirement so that businesses, citizens and administrations can make the most of the potential that they offer. Efficient data networks can unleash a powerful stimulus for growth and create new jobs, particularly in rural regions that are far away from economic and population centres. The new forms of work organisation within businesses ushered in by broadband internet help to make procedures more efficient and to make the use of public services easier and cheaper for citizens, as well as facilitating access to educational content. Of course, the fact cannot be ignored that expanding access to broadband internet in all parts

of the Elbe-Weser region comes with an enormous price tag. In addition to laying fibre optic cables – and depending on the local circumstances – wireless solutions should be sought in order to provide more distant communities with a similarly modern connection.

I support the further development of the Lower Saxony Broadband Competence Centre (Breitband Kompetenzzentrum Niedersachsen) in Osterholz-Scharmbeck (www.breitband-niedersachsen.de). My goal is for everyone in the Elbe-Weser region to have fast internet.

The digitalisation of our society offers many more opportunities and affects many more areas of life today that it did a few years ago. I therefore support:

- further developing e-government facilities in municipalities and counties.
E-government as a way for citizens to interact with the authorities will continue to expand in the coming years. Going to deal with the relevant public office is a real problem, due to having to make rather long trips, cut into working hours and undertake complex procedures. The ability to make applications online, to participate in administrative procedures such as published land-use plans via internet portals, and simply to speed up procedures, is an advantage for authorities and citizens alike.
- setting up a common IT service group that establishes trans-regional platforms and takes over support on IT issues for municipalities, counties, and authorities.
Municipalities can make use of digital infrastructure to exploit synergies between themselves and also pool expenditure to a greater extent than before. This could be achieved by setting up a common IT service group, enabling municipalities to offer and make use of services among themselves.
- developing fast internet connections with fibre optic cables and wireless connections, especially to give more rural regions a fast internet connection.

Due to demographic change, the population of rural areas in particular is getting older and people living in these areas are finding it more difficult to participate in the life of society. A good digital infrastructure can remedy this situation, maintaining social contacts and

especially allowing various consumer products to be supplied via online retail, as a complement to the traditional retail sector.

- revising the provision of online education for schools in rural areas.

The population decline in rural areas also affects our schools. Small schools in particular are threatened with extinction. The result for many pupils would be a long journey to the nearest school. Online courses could provide a medium-term solution for educational authorities, particularly in terms of staffing, and thus enable smaller schools to remain open.

- installing public wi-fi access.

There are already public wi-fi networks in many countries, including within the EU. It is now customary, particularly in large cities, to be able to access such networks and take advantage of what is on offer, such as in the area of tourism.

VII. Family-friendliness, education and instruction: more choice, less uniformity

Education and instruction at different stages of life are even more important today than in the past. Education in crèches and child daycare centres as well as schools and all adult education institutions are vital location-related factors for rural areas. In this regard, we can build on well developed care and education provisions. The system must be improved, while preserving or restoring the maximum degree of freedom of choice for parents, children and young people. Equal opportunities for all children should be ensured, with each child having access to a schooling and an education that takes account of their talents. More specifically, I have the following objectives for the various stages of life:

- Since 2013, every child is legally entitled to a place at a crèche. A number of extra crèche places were created by the CDU-led government from 2008; 35% of children have places for care, education and instruction. Needs-based further development must now follow. One focus in the coming years will need to be on making childcare hours

more flexible, which is essential given the changing conditions on the labour market. Child daycare centres must not be overburdened by a purported duty to educate. Childcare must be able to be practically implemented and should not be over-regulated. It is particularly important to ensure good cooperation between child daycare centres and primary schools. Care should be made more flexible, there should be more all-day options, and childminder initiatives should be promoted.

- The balance between work and family life should be further improved by giving young people incentives and the realistic possibility to take responsibility for family planning, and by giving well-educated young women in particular the possibility of pursuing a career that matches their qualifications without having to give up on having a family. This must be backed up by enhancing understanding among businesses, so as to expand flexible working hours and in-work childcare opportunities. This will provide women with equal opportunities to realise their professional potential and to reach managerial positions.
- Given variations in pupil numbers, the entire school situation must be evaluated and its structure continuously tailored to changing circumstances; meanwhile, the principle of schooling that is as close to home as possible should remain intact. The top priority must remain the development of all-day schooling across the board, and flexible education, instruction and care options. Continuous development of all-day schools must be pursued. At the same time, care must be taken not to leave municipalities to finance this alone. In particular, given the falling numbers of pupils, resources that have been freed up in this area should be used, and cooperation with non-school authorities should be reinforced.
- In my view, special needs schools are still important. In particular, we are opposed to the closure of the "Lernen" special needs schools. The right to inclusion must be retained, but this must not be an obligation that is detrimental to the children. A pedagogically sound approach to this issue must be developed.

- The introduction of secondary schools ensures that schooling commensurate to pupils' talent is available everywhere. Thus it has been possible to lay the groundwork for rendering previous ideological debates about schooling unnecessary in favour of a focus on students' needs, and for ensuring that every pupil, across the board, now has access to the best possible education close to their home.
- Gymnasiums (grammar schools) must retain their separate status and be further developed. Gymnasiums that already exist must under no circumstances be replaced by comprehensive schools (*Gesamtschulen*), as this runs the risk that gymnasium curricula will no longer be sufficiently taught. Sufficient teaching provision is the highest priority for all types of school. At this point, reference should be made to the situation at the end of David McAllister's *Bundesland* government (up to 2013), when the teaching provision was much better than it is now.

I also support all efforts

- to raise the level of education and vocational training in schools and, where necessary, to supplement it by means of private schools
- to provide a wide variety of vocational schools and to strive to develop them into "regional competence centres" for vocational training. Close cooperation and coordination with the domestic economy is key in this regard.
- to strengthen the "independent schools" programme
- to establish or develop technical colleges. A good example is the Maritime College in Cuxhaven.
- to further promote the development of the colleges in the Elbe-Weser region (e.g. hochschule 21 in Buxtehude, or the PFH Private University Göttingen, Hansecampus Stade). Dual courses – jointly offered by colleges and businesses – make our region significantly more attractive to students and young professionals and will have a long-lasting positive impact on economic development. As far as possible, future efforts should be made to strive for such closer cooperation between colleges and businesses in other locations so as to ensure that the Elbe-Weser region's supply of workers meets

its needs and is equipped for the future. The same applies to cooperation with existing adult education institutions.

- to strengthen the close cooperation with Hamburg, Bremen and Bremerhaven so as to make the most of the opportunities offered by those communities' universities and technical colleges for our region.

VIII. Agricultural and food industry: less paternalism – more trust!

The food industry is one of the most important economic sectors in the Elbe-Weser region. The main concern of our region's agriculture, which is characterised by medium-sized operations, is to produce healthy and safe food for consumers, taking the requirements of nature conservation and animal welfare into account.

The twin facts of a growing world population and steadily shrinking agricultural land area will continue to require agriculture to become more efficient by making use of progress in technology and breeding, in line with resource-efficient and environmentally friendly production. Agriculture in the Elbe-Weser region has seen substantial increases in productivity in recent years while also using quality assurance systems to help increase food security. It is therefore doing its bit to solve the food question, so crucial for the future of humanity.

The Elbe-Weser region, with the large number of highly efficient farms established here, its farmers' technical expertise and high level of education, and well established distribution channels, has become one of the few German agricultural regions that has developed a European vision for the future. This is particularly true for the dairy sector, the processing industry, and arable farming, as well as fruit growing on the lower Elbe. I wish to strongly support this development, thereby making our contribution to the acceptance of modern agricultural production methods by means of social dialogue.

Due to its major investments in agricultural equipment, livestock and alternative energy sources, agriculture has strongly contributed to the economic development of up- and downstream sectors and the banking sector in the Elbe-Weser region; meanwhile, here as nowhere else, agricultural production has also been brought into line with consumer protection and animal welfare, as well as conservation of nature and the environment. Similarly, land management processes are increasingly taking the conservation of species-rich biological resources into account.

I am committed to a non-ideological and forward-looking agricultural policy that takes existing structures in agriculture and the food industry with its significant overheads as a given, and develops them further in accordance with economic, environmental and social requirements that are in line with social demands. A holistic sustainability-based approach is my guiding philosophy. However, the agricultural policy framework must allow farming families to develop their farms in such a way as to survive and earn a decent income in a climate of tough global competition.

The possibilities offered by the renewable energy law have been used extensively in the Elbe-Weser region for years, meaning that farmers make use of renewable raw materials, residues from livestock and biogenic waste and thereby make the contribution to climate protection and sustainable energy supply that is urged by politicians.

In my view, however, food production takes priority over energy production. There is now sufficient evidence that biogas production from renewable raw materials has led to distortions in the land markets, with correspondingly dramatic rent price rises, meaning that some conventional and also organic grassland and arable farming operations are no longer able to participate in lease markets. Therefore I support the equal co-existence of different industries, and appropriately balanced government support for energy production. This notwithstanding, investment in bioenergy was always based on the conditions that existed when the decision to invest was made, meaning that grandfathering is not up for debate.

A large proportion of the Elbe-Weser region's agricultural value creation is thanks to the processing industry. Milk and piglets, as well as pork, poultry and beef are produced with the highest degree of expertise. As well as the objective quality of their products, our farming

families are also increasingly faced with social discussions regarding livestock. I am committed to further developing the conditions in which livestock is kept, without losing sight of farms' competitiveness; I am against ideologically motivated tokenistic policies that have no benefit for animal welfare.

Moreover, I call for clean groundwater. Promoting improved nutrient management systems counteracts negative trends in terms of nitrate levels.

All in all, I would like to ensure that agriculture retains its (not just economically) important and central position in the society of the rural Elbe-Weser region by striving for conditions that will bring together social acceptance of agricultural production and its competitiveness. Woodlands and forestry fulfil a variety of functions. Aside from the huge significance for jobs throughout the "wood cluster" in rural areas, timber as a raw material is providing those who own woodland with increasingly large incomes. Woodland also fulfils specific environmental functions: it is the foundation for communities of many different species, preserves groundwater, makes a significant contribution to climate protection, and is a valuable part of the range of options for local recreation and leisure activities. I am strongly in favour of a sustainable concept for making use of woodland, and against the closure of privately owned woods.

Sustainable fishing is practised on the North Sea coastline. This is particularly the case for crab, coastal, and small and large deep-sea fisheries. These should continue to be prioritised. They have must sufficient space, and in cases where there is a conflict with other uses, their requirements must be adequately taken into account. Modernising the fishing fleet is essential if structures are to be retained and fishing is to be safeguarded in this location. Funding programmes should help in this regard. Meanwhile, businesses on the ground can only invest if fishing can provide an adequate income. This is a sector that has seen significant over-regulation, making fishermen less effective while failing to produce a corresponding benefit.

IX. Environmental protection in the Elbe-Weser triangle: less ideology – more progress!

One of the guidelines for CDU policy is proper consideration of the requirements of environmental protection and nature conservation. The responsibility – including towards future generations – to preserve creation is a high priority for us Christian Democrats. The diverse landscape of the Elbe-Weser region ranges from the Wadden Sea to wetlands, moorland, geest terrain and heathland, and possesses a diversity of species that, in our view, it is important to preserve.

I am quite convinced that effective environmental protection and nature conservation requires joint efforts on the part of all stakeholders, and especially the involvement of landowners and farmers. A constructive combination of official nature conservation, volunteers, associations and users is beneficial in this regard, as many nature conservation projects in the Elbe-Weser region in recent years demonstrate.

Measures taken by individuals should continue to be encouraged; explicit recognition of voluntary activities to protect species – e.g. the improvement and creation of semi-natural bodies of water, planting hedges and flowering strips for indigenous flora and fauna, protecting native grassland birds – is very important, including as part of conservation programmes. Counties' revenue from assessing the hunting tax should go to nature conservation projects managed by the regional hunting associations (*Kreisjägerschaften*). Intact raised bogs and fens are not only important for climate protection; they also contribute to a thriving and viable home region. They constitute important reservoirs, preventing flooding in moorland villages. No more peat will be extracted beyond existing priority areas, and existing priority areas will be reviewed. Moor grassland, typical for the landscape of this area, should be preserved for agricultural use, and economic prospects for farmers identified.

Therefore, I am in favour of viable models to conserve and sustainably use moorlands.

Protected areas are important in terms of providing habitats for endangered plants and animals. We support compromise-based designations of protected areas to preserve our unique landscape, with rules that are acceptable both for people and for our region.

The preservation of our cultural landscape via nature conservation contributes to tourism and is a driver for the regional economy, and therefore for our villages' future.

In future, too, conservation behind the dikes along the coastline and the Elbe must be guaranteed for the long term. A floodplain should be provided to give areas under the Habitats Directive enough space, as well as to protect settlements. Dike shepherds play an important role in maintaining the dikes. Given increasing predation by wolves, dike security is the priority, leading to wolf-free areas being designated along our coastal protection line.

We cannot tolerate the increasing impact that nitrates are having on groundwater bodies that are close to the surface. In addition to specialist legislation, measures should be implemented in cooperation with water companies, municipalities and farmers (depending on their efficiency) in order to bring these levels down. Risks potentially caused by the use of fracking technology to extract natural gas must be minimised and the overriding priority must be to protect potable water, the most important thing that people consume; I reject the use of fracking in water conservation zones.

Preserving nature requires knowledge about nature. I therefore wish to further develop environmental education in kindergartens, schools, and adult education, including with the involvement of recognised nature conservation associations.

In order not to fuel any more land take and to conserve agricultural land, I consider a steering land strategy to be beneficial and call for compensation in kind and compensation payments to be placed on an equal footing, going entirely to aid nature conservation.

I am in favour of practical nature conservation and environmental protection, which involves weighing up all stakeholders' interests in a balanced manner. In this context, the frequent and ideological abuse of the right to bring class actions must be curtailed. Moreover, NGOs (non-governmental organisations) must become much more transparent: what interest groups are behind these often opaque organisations, and who is financing them? Are they really working

for the general good, or are they serving individual interests? Legislators and administrations need to demand more clarity, e.g. in laws relating to non-profits.

X. More social cohesion in rural areas

I would like to maintain and enhance the Elbe-Weser region as a place where everyone lives together healthily and with good social relations, acting for each other and with each other. We need to conserve our villages and give them the opportunity to rejuvenate and further develop. Young people must also be able to build in the place where they grew up so that they can continue to live in their home towns. The planning authority's narrow interpretation of paragraph 34 of the German Building Code (BauGB) regarding backland development on a case by case basis, and primarily the promulgation of the Odour Immission Directive (GIRL), means that young families are increasingly finding it impossible to acquire a permit to build in their home villages in the current legal context. The legal provisions in the Building Code and the GIRL must be revised in favour of our villages.

In contrast to population centres, rural areas continue to be at a disadvantage in terms of social policy issues. The Elbe-Weser region must be treated equally with the population centres of Hamburg and Bremen in order to ensure uniform living conditions.

This is particularly true for the provision of doctors. We must ensure that care provided in rural areas by doctors or in hospitals will continue to be provided close to people's homes. The EUR 400 000 of support provided by Lower Saxony to doctors to settle there only led to a small number of new country doctors by the end of 2014. The *Bundesland* must top up this support. The law to enhance medical care launched by federal health minister Hermann Gröhe, which also included incentives for doctors to settle in rural areas, is a step in the right direction. Local councillors and mayors should actively entice young doctors by promoting the advantages of their respective municipalities. Model projects such as "Landpartie Zeven" are going in the right direction. The Elbe-Weser region can benefit from the fact that young doctors who want to live in northern Lower Saxony have studied medicine at the European

Medical School in Oldenburg or the Hannover Medical School (MHH). Early contact must be made with medical students.

Adequate and high quality clinic care must be ensured for the Elbe-Weser region. To achieve this, the focus must be on lean and effective structures.

Strengthening families in their role as communities of responsibility continues to be one of our important policy goals. Families are the bedrock of our coexistence. Families should feel happy and accepted in the Elbe-Weser region. Family-friendliness must be a hallmark of our region. We support the local family associations that have already sprung up in large numbers in the Elbe-Weser region. A particular characteristic of family-friendliness is the balance between work and family life. Therefore, I call for crèches and kindergartens near people's homes. It is also important to support mothers and fathers who want to bring up their child at home during the first few years of the child's life.

Improved public transport with a denser network and stops that are more frequently served makes a decisive contribution to family-friendliness, allowing children and young people to be more independently mobile. This would lighten the load on single parents in particular, of which some 90 percent are women. Community buses and group taxis that can be requested by telephone are a good way to supplement public transport.

Many people – principally volunteers – care for others who are in need or simply require assistance and support. Volunteers contribute to social cohesion in society, and their efforts take the strain off state institutions. Therefore volunteers, even if their work is free of charge, should be encouraged as much as possible. Many municipalities support volunteers with discounts, e.g. by means of a volunteers' card. Other counties, towns and municipalities should follow this example. In my view, financial aid for associations is a particularly important part of supporting voluntary work.

I want all generations to live together in harmony. Older people should play their part in actively shaping life in the community. Even more use should be made of their experience and skills. Older people and younger people can benefit from each other. This is why we need older people in organisations and political parties. But older people also need services that are

tailored to them, such as the trips for older people offered by many municipalities. I am particularly in favour of the work done by intergenerational homes and senior citizens' advisory councils in the Elbe-Weser region.

XI. Immigration: An opportunity and challenge for the Elbe-Weser region

Immigration to the Elbe-Weser region has increased considerably. The various groups of immigrants should be differentiated:

- people who have been persecuted on political grounds in their home country are entitled to asylum in Germany for the duration of the threat in their home country. The fact that all European countries can now be classified as safe countries of origin is a success of European policy. It must therefore be made clear to asylum seekers from these countries that their applications have no chance of being successful.
- people fleeing war and civil war are – under the provisions of the Geneva Convention – also welcome until fighting stops in their home countries, even if they have come to Germany in spite of European agreements to the contrary.
- people who have come to Germany due to difficult economic conditions in their home countries have no fundamental right to remain in Germany, even if the motives of these immigrants are fully understandable. It is in everyone's interest to clear this up soon.
- skilled workers who come to Germany under regulated procedures are more necessary than ever. I am emphatically in favour of the immigration of qualified and motivated women and men.

I have deep sympathy for the suffering of the thousands of civil war refugees and asylum seekers. They should be able to have a good fresh start in the Elbe-Weser region. We want to help them. We are also deeply thankful to the many full-time and volunteer helpers who care

for refugees and asylum seekers, e.g. in the German Red Cross or in neighbourhood initiatives.

However, I am also aware that increased migration creates major challenges for towns and municipalities. Accommodating refugees and asylum seekers has already reached – or exceeded – the capacities of some towns and municipalities. Accommodation options have become scarce in many places. Accommodation is problematic for cities and municipalities during the winter in particular. Better *Bundesland* and federal support is needed to help the municipalities to cope with this task. The *Bundesland* government must distribute all the national funding for municipalities, and supplement it with its own funding. Not everyone who makes an application for asylum in the Elbe-Weser region will be given the right to stay. This is particularly true for asylum seekers from the Balkans and other safe countries of origin who want to live in the Elbe-Weser region for economic reasons.

Economic immigrants should be distinguished from refugees and those entitled to asylum. Asylum law does not give economic immigrants any right to remain. I am committed to ensuring that Lower Saxony stops sending people from safe countries of origin to the municipalities, but rather keeps them in the central reception centres until the asylum procedure is completed. Bavaria's specialised centres for immigrants from the Balkans are also a good example for Lower Saxony. Unsuccessful asylum seekers must return to their home countries. The future of the Balkans must not be jeopardised due to a mass emigration of young people for economic reasons. These people are urgently needed to develop their home countries and make them economically stronger. If a person does not leave voluntarily, he or she must be removed. Lower Saxony, and county public order offices, are called on to dedicate more efforts to implementing removals and to raise the removal quota.

I see a Europe of open borders, facilitating travel and the movement of goods, as a major achievement. However, I can also see that making it easier for foreign criminals to cross borders is a threat to internal security. I therefore call for the police in the Elbe-Weser region to receive every assistance to allow them to better detect people smugglers and gangs of burglars and to prevent the abuse of asylum.

Refugees and those entitled to asylum who are permitted to remain and whose new home, for the time being, is the Elbe-Weser region should be helped to find a job so that they do not have to subsist on benefit payments in the long term. Learning German is a precondition for this, and should start while the asylum procedure is ongoing. Refugees and asylum seekers with formal qualifications can enrich the economy of the Elbe-Weser region; I am in favour of integrating these people into our society. All refugees and asylum seekers are expected to show a desire to integrate and to comply with our country's fundamental values. For me, the values of non-violence, liberal democracy, gender equality and religious tolerance are essential, and must also be extended to foreign migrants. Our constitution and laws are the basis for peaceful co-existence.

XII. Demographic change – see the opportunities!

Demographic change, a societal "mega-trend", is especially significant for the largely rural Elbe-Weser region. The total population is decreasing, while people are on average getting older and society is becoming more diverse. However, not every municipality has experienced these fundamental changes; demographic developments, too, are regionally specific. These developments have risks, but also offer major opportunities for the Elbe-Weser region.

The risks must be tackled by making adjustments as early as possible. In particular, therefore, I would argue in favour of taking long-term demographic developments into account when planning infrastructure, towns and schools. Principally, approaches to deal with housing stocks in rural areas must be developed. Against this backdrop, I welcome the fact that the first counties and municipalities – including some in our region – are preparing to implement joint measures to cope with demographic change. It should be the goal of political decisions to optimise what is on offer, not to permanently reduce it. The municipal reorganisation of territorial structures – completed in many places, started in others – is already bearing first fruit. I continue to support this route for municipalities, where it is beneficial or desirable. Demographic developments also suggest increased investment in education.

In my view, if these principles are applied consistently, then successful integration will enrich society in the Elbe-Weser region.

Demographic developments must also be seized as a significant opportunity in the Elbe-Weser region. Living longer also means participating in the life of society longer. Experience and traditions can be handed down. Now more than ever before, the coexistence of old and young, rooted in our society's cultural values, is the way of life of the future and underpins our society.

XIII. Efficient administrative structures for effective municipalities and counties

As early as the beginning of the millennium, I warned against a fragmentation of the Elbe-Weser region due to a one-sided focus on the population centres. Assigning the responsibility for governing to *Bundesland* level was able to prevent this. The progress made at that time thanks to significant corrections intended to strengthen rural areas has been quickly mishandled and undone by the new *Bundesland* government since 2013. In particular, the administrative reform that had strengthened municipal self-government at county and municipal level by abolishing regional governments was counteracted by the re-establishment of regional officials. The ban on new debts after 2020 – now enshrined in the constitution – risks failing from the outset because the *Bundesland* government is unable to handle the available resources prudently and responsibly. This is all the more alarming because the state's tax receipts are currently higher than ever before. I will take steps to ensure that bureaucratic obstacles are eliminated and financial means are used sensibly and in a results-oriented way.

Going forward, efforts need to be redoubled to develop and implement joint action strategies. This also includes making full use of cooperation with the large urban areas and associations.

Long term, a municipality must have adequate funding if it is to be able to fulfil its duties for the benefit of citizens. Allowing municipalities to retain and/or fully recover their ability to

act financially is, therefore, a key objective for me. In my view, four key conditions must be met if this goal is to be reached:

1. Municipalities' funding from both the federal and the *Bundesland* government must be fair and commensurate with the principle of connexity.

In recent years, there have been significant efforts from the federal level, in particular, to relieve the financial strain on counties, as well as towns and municipalities, and to redistribute the costs of social changes. Assuming the costs of a subsistence allowance for the elderly and those receiving incapacity benefit, and the increased contribution from the federal government towards the costs of accommodation, are key examples. However, it is also particularly important in future that when it is assigning duties to the municipalities, the *Bundesland* respects the principle of connexity more and fully reimburses the incurred costs. In terms of refugee accommodation, financial agreements should be struck between national, *Bundesland* and municipal authorities to ensure a timely arrangement regarding payment or reimbursement of all incurred costs. Municipalities can only have the necessary financial room for manoeuvre to be able to dedicate themselves to education and integration – important issues for the future – if they are able to house and care for people without incurring net costs. If the integration of the large numbers of migrants that is badly needed fails due to financial mismatches between the various levels of government, then the state as a whole will have failed.

2. Municipalities must assume their responsibilities efficiently and in line with current demands and opportunities.

I still think that modernising municipal administrations and enhancing cooperation among municipalities has considerable potential. Unfortunately, we must note that the huge potential of the internet and modern technology has hitherto often been criminally neglected by German administrations, in contrast to other European countries. Although it is theoretically possible to bring in ways to accomplish administrative procedures electronically, thus leading to a socially responsible reduction in administrative staff, the staff numbers in county administrations and town halls are once again on the rise. The increase in responsibilities and different arrangements (e.g. more part time work) only partially explain this. Consistent optimisation of procedures and bolder use of up-to-date technology would limit further

increases in staff numbers. In addition to financial savings, optimising administrative procedures also tends to increase service quality for citizens, such as the online portal for consulting building permits (BauakteOnline). Enhancing cooperation among municipalities can create synergies. For example, not every municipality needs its own construction depot or its own IT department that is equally responsible for all tasks. Merging or forming a group in order to specialise are up-to-date responses to increasing demands. If this approach is taken seriously, then all options are up for consideration.

3. Municipal policy must take sensible and responsible decisions, concentrating not only on what is desirable but also on what is feasible.

Improved funding from the *Bundesland* and the federal government, optimised administrative procedures and real inter-municipal cooperation give our municipalities fresh room for manoeuvre. It will be critical not to carelessly squander the savings made thanks to municipal policy by spending more in other areas. The budget law for the municipalities of Lower Saxony stipulates – similarly to the *Bundesland*- and federal-level debt brake – that counties, towns and municipalities must run their economies sustainably and not get into a vicious circle where new debts mount up. I take this moral duty to future generations seriously. Discretionary payments should therefore always be scrutinised and should be limited to the lowest amount possible as set out in the budget. Limiting and reducing municipal debt should be the rule in our region, not the exception. This is the only way that we can enable municipalities to boldly plan for the future and make future-oriented investments.

4. The opportunities of the large urban areas of Hamburg and Bremen/Oldenburg should be used for the Elbe-Weser region. Cooperation in terms of structural policy serves to optimise the functioning of the economy, science and infrastructure, and also aids positioning thanks to a joint external marketing strategy. At the same time, the Elbe-Weser region must always be considered in its entirety and must not allow itself to be divided up. It must always remain a cultural and economic whole. This is best guaranteed by close cooperation between the five counties with the regional associations and institutions.

XIV. Domestic security: less crime – more security for the Elbe-Weser region

My party has always been the party of domestic security. We feel even more committed to this mission given our rapidly changing world, with its constantly evolving challenges in the fight against crime.

We welcomed the positive crime trends in our 2011 manifesto, with fewer cases and a higher proportion of cases solved; however, I note that since the change of government in Lower Saxony, while the number of crimes is still lower than it was ten years ago, the proportion of cases solved, which had reached 63% under the CDU-led *Bundesland* government, is now falling (60.6% in 2014). I therefore call on the *Bundesland* government to once again make domestic security a priority in the future. Specifically, this means:

- strengthening crime prevention and improving victim protection. In this regard, efforts to combat extremism by means of enhanced cooperation with schools and youth welfare services should be a high priority.
- improving staffing for a police force that is close to citizens, is consistently out on the beat and that uses modern resources to also tackle minor crimes and violations.
- rapidly introducing effective investigation methods and more police patrols to prevent increasingly frequent domestic break-ins.
- offsetting burdens placed on the police by large disaster areas and large-scale deployments, such as football matches or protests. This must not be detrimental to local police presence.
- strengthening of the State Protection Office (*Verfassungsschutz*) as an "early warning system", in particular with regard to combating political extremism.
- making sustained efforts to combat rising crime related to motorcycle gangs.
- setting up a centre of expertise on internet and cyber crime, with the appropriate level of connectivity between all relevant institutions.
- enhancing resources for the judiciary to ensure faster procedures and thus more timely prosecution.

The Bremervörde prison opened in January 2013, and its success has met all the expectations that we outlined in our previous manifesto. I consider the public-private partnership (PPP) principle – used here for the first time for a prison in Lower Saxony – to have been well implemented, and call on the *Bundesland* government to carry out a fair audit, together with an assessment of other areas where the *Bundesland* might sensibly use PPP.

XV. More cultural diversity and tourism in the Elbe-Weser region

In the era of globalisation, it is more important than ever to preserve and strengthen our region's cultural landscape. Strengthening our region's unmistakable hallmarks – our cultural heritage, varied history, hospitality, high degree of civic engagement, and strong cultural life – is, and will remain, an important goal.

As well as conserving and promoting the Low German language, I would like to see more promotion of the various local cultural attractions that have been brought to life both due to investment from the *Bundesland* (e.g. the artists' colonies of Fischerhude and Worpswede) and thanks to extensive volunteer efforts. In my view, therefore, it is important that culture is seen and organised even more strongly as a network than has previously been the case, to ensure that cultural offerings are clearer and thus have more of an impact.

In the field of tourism, combining structures and offerings – which I have always supported – has already produced many good results. In this domain, too, various forms of volunteering have enabled cultural offerings to have much more of an external effect; initiatives involving several counties, such as the Osteland Association (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Osteland), are exemplary and will continue to have my support in future. Tourist resources that have been successfully established at county level, such as the "North Paths" ("Nordpfade") in Rotenburg county, should be scrutinised in collaboration with the county tourist boards with a view to rolling them out across the whole Elbe-Weser region.

Cycle tourism is developing in a very positive direction and is increasingly attractive to holidaymakers. The Elbe and Weser cycle path must be maintained and further developed. Good quality cycle paths are attractive for everyone and provide added value for our region.

XVI. Europe, Germany and the Elbe-Weser region

Together with chancellors Adenauer and Kohl, the CDU managed to unify our country and to integrate Europe – in the face of resistance from our political competitors. We are proud of this fact.

I wholeheartedly support the task of bringing about internal German unity – a task that continues, 25 years on – especially as unity has given all Germans tremendous opportunities. Economic and cultural ties in the new German *bundesländer* have also strengthened our region. Chancellor Angela Merkel's involvement should be rated particularly highly in this regard.

Businesses are being encouraged to set up in all regions. When supporting the economy, therefore, the main question can no longer be whether an area or project to be supported is in a particular region – the east or the west – but rather whether the social and economic data shows that support is required. By making this call, we are in line with the federal and *Bundesland* governments. However, joint decisions must also be supported and implemented by all.

I have always been in favour of European integration. The European Union, which has grown to 28 Member States, offers us huge opportunities for our economic development. Peace, the rule of law, democracy, social justice and a market economy are now firmly established in all European countries. However, European integration must not infringe on the principle of subsidiarity: the only questions that should be decided in Brussels and Strasbourg are ones that cannot be adequately solved at lower levels. As an MEP, I am in favour of us being actively involved in and having an influence on framing European concerns.

EU structural funding has been of considerable benefit to the Elbe-Weser region. In the 2007-2013 EU funding period, a total of EUR 1.2 billion was invested in the former district of Lüneburg. This funding helped to carry out numerous projects and create jobs in the region. The necessary infrastructure projects that led to Siemens siting a plant in Cuxhaven could only be carried out thanks to EU funding and its consistent application by the CDU-led *Bundesland* government. I successfully made efforts to ensure that these subsidies were only used for projects that would generate sustainable economic growth. Innovative measures and projects were developed and financed so that new, future-proof jobs could be created. Moreover, research and infrastructure was promoted and our rural areas developed. Since our Elbe-Weser region in particular has experienced excellent economic development in recent years, the former district of Lüneburg will no longer be an "Objective 1 region" for current EU funding. Nonetheless, I am strongly committed to generating more sustainable economic development in the 2014-2020 period.

The German armed forces not only guarantee peace and freedom for us all, but also make a substantial contribution to stability in conflict zones by participating in international deployments. Many soldiers from the Elbe-Weser region have been and are involved in these operations. They have society's full backing and appreciation. The armed forces bases – for example in Seedorf, Nordholz and Garlstedt – must be equipped (by means of investments in human and material resources) so that the important tasks set by politics and society are also able to be fulfilled.

The Elbe-Weser region will play an important role in Germany and Europe if we make use of our regional advantages and fully participate in the tasks at hand. In this sense, the CDU sees itself as the party of the Elbe-Weser region and will make every effort to attain these objectives.