EUROPE'S INTEGRATION MYTHS

A guide for successfully debunking myths surrounding the European Union

CREDITS

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The GLOBSEC Policy Institute is a policy-oriented think-tank analysing foreign policy and international environment. It focuses on research which is relevant to decision-makers, business leaders and all concerned citizens. The Institute wants to make an impact so that values of the GLOBSEC organisation – liberal and democratic order in the transatlantic world – are deeply embedded in the agenda of governments.

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INTRODUCTION

What people think matters in our increasingly high-speed, post-truth, well-connected world. However, what people choose to think is sometimes based on false assumptions. An overwhelming abundance of information is as counter-productive as the lack of it. Few people have time to sieve through the flood of information they receive every minute; even fewer strive to verify 'facts and figures'. That is why GLOBSEC decided to develop a concise guide that helps address some of the most common myths about the European Union (EU) in a succinct and comprehensible manner.

▶ **Who is it for?**

This short guide is primarily aimed at politicians, communication and media officers, public officials, civil society activists and teachers frustrated by the use of alternative facts to undermine their work in building a better EU for everyone. They can use it as a reference point. But in the end, the messages are for all concerned citizens.

▶ **Why have a copy?**

People demand direct communication from their public officials. It takes time to select and highlight the necessary information or construct a logical argument. Indeed, it is almost impossible to remember everything surrounding every issue. This guide will be your reliable and time-saving companion on occasions when you are faced with a difficult question or find it necessary to correct faulty assumptions.

And these occasions will be more and more frequent. Elections to the European Parliament are only a year away. Discussions about reform of the EU are accelerating, and citizens need to be convinced of their meaningfulness and value. National conventions are happening in more and more countries. Journalists never stop asking questions.

▶ **Why focus on the following myths?**

First, our Strategic Communication team, which monitors disinformation, has highlighted these myths as the most popular misconceptions currently circulating in public discourse. Second, these myths correlate with the most popular EU-related searches on Google – areas, events and topics. Third, we included old and new questions frequently raised at press conferences or in the media. Some of them are not new but have been given a new life by social media and bots.

▶ **Do facts matter?**

Yes, more than ever. But it is of course also about how facts are communicated. Facts are regularly used as part of a personal story or passionate address. Similarly, social media and communication strategies disseminate ideas and 'truths'. A tweet can by funny, touching, trustworthy and reality-based all at the same time. We aim to help with the latter part of the mix.

We prepared this guide as a supplement to discussions at GLOBSEC 2018 Bratislava Forum. We hope you will find formal and informal discussions at the Forum inspiring and informative. But we also wanted you to walk away with something that supplements intricate messages with digestible, reasoned and seasoned answers that you can easily offer to media, constituents and others. ●

GLOBSEC
IDEAS SHAPING THE WORLD

MYTH #1: THE EUROPEAN UNION IS FALLING APART

Popular thinking: *In the past decade the European Union (EU) has been hit by many serious challenges. The global financial crisis, the influx of refugees and Brexit referendum sent shock waves across Europe and cast doubt on the future of the European project. Every crisis has been followed increasingly vocal predictions that the EU's days are well and truly numbered. Today, the number of people disillusioned with Brussels has grown and Eurosceptic voices can be heard from Lisbon to Warsaw.*

Reality check: It is true that the UK's departure is of historic significance. Yet, it is an exaggeration to state that the EU is falling apart. By many counts the EU is doing quite well.

The EU has delivered more than half a century of peace, stability, prosperity and helped raise living standards. Member states' GDP has grown from $3.8 trillion in 1980 to $16.5 trillion in 2016. Indeed, the International Monetary Fund predicts that GDP will reach $24 trillion in 5 years.

### European Union – GDP, current prices

Source: IMF, 2018.
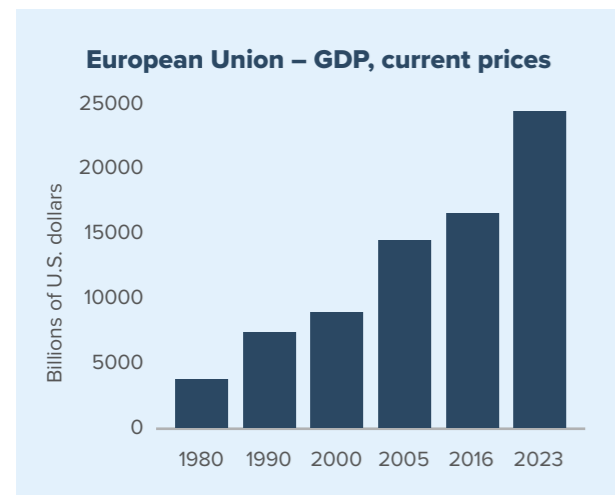
Moreover, the EU is adept at following through on the aims of its treaties. In 2017, for example, Brussels adopted 254 binding legislative acts, including 6 Council regulations, 1 directive and 247 decisions. What is more, the EU amended 32 regulations, 3 directives and 74 decisions over the same period. That means Brussels delivered 363 binding acts across 2017 - 25% of all acts adopted by the EU (1338)[1]. This is a similar number to the 'pre-economic crisis' EU of 2007, which adopted 1275 acts, from which 217 were binding.

The European Council also works to a similar level of speed and decisiveness. It meets in Brussels on a monthly basis. Last year, the heads of state or government of all EU countries met nine times for regular sessions, twice for informal meetings, as well as topical summits on the Digital Agenda in Tallinn and Growth and Employment in Brussels.[2]

The EU is also successful in negotiating trade deals with third countries and has emerged as a key driver in efforts to maintain the global trading system. So far, Brussels has brokered 37 trade agreements, 47 are partly in place and 9 are pending. At the time of writing, member states have access to 84 markets outside the EU. These does not include the promising trade deals with Mercosur countries or with India.

EU trade agreements

Source: The European Commission, 2018.[3]
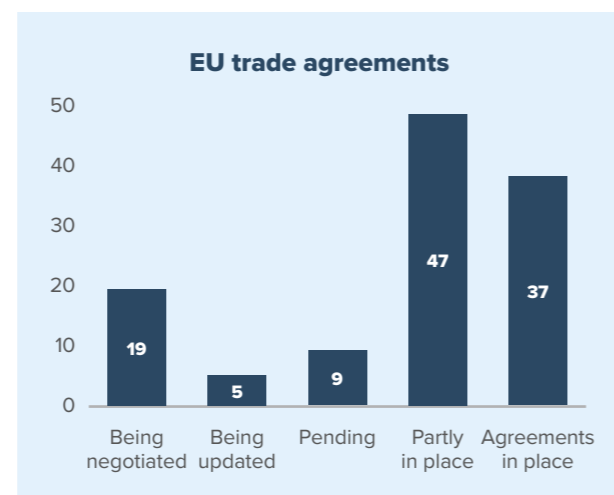
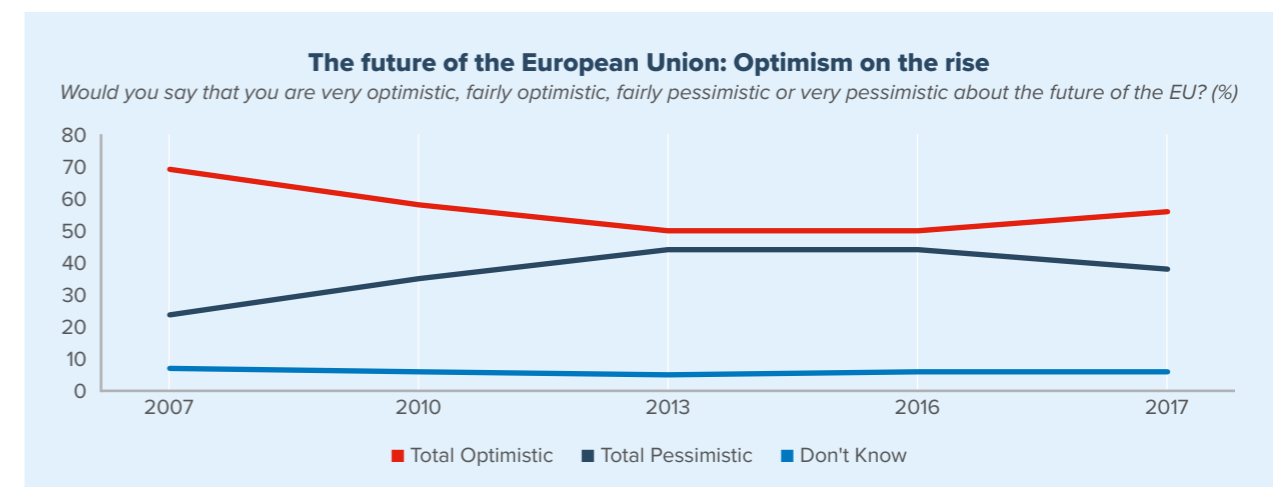Finally, member states remain keen to cooperate on developing new initiatives. One of the most high-profile projects in recent years is the European Union defence pact, otherwise known as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). The initiative aims to deepen defence cooperation among 'capable and willing' member states (so far 25) in order to jointly develop capabilities and make them available for EU military operations.[4]

Such an extensive range of initiatives reflect that the EU is like a living creature which learns from its mistakes, adapts to new developments and adjusts its outlook. For instance, following Greenland's decision to separate from the EU in 1985 (after 3 years of negotiations)[5], Brussels embarked on a review process culminating in the Lisbon Treaty (2009). For the first time in its history, the EU developed procedures for member states to voluntarily withdraw from the Union. In his April 2018 speech to the European Parliament, French President Emmanuel Macron also highlighted 'weak points' within the EU that necessitate "building a new European sovereignty which will give a clear response to our citizens and show that we can protect them in this changing world".[6]

It is true that some citizens are disappointed with the EU's policies and initiatives. Austerity measures implemented by the so-called troika - the International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and European Commission – have been a major source of discontent Greece, Italy and Spain. Brexit happened because British citizens felt that the EU is inefficient and represents the interests of a cosmopolitan elite.

Yet such negative perceptions are increasingly at odds with the opinion of many Europeans. According to opinion polls conducted by Eurobarometer, optimism for the future of the EU grew from 49% in 2012 to 56% in 2017. The EU's public image is also improving, with 40% viewing today the organisation positively against 21% negatively (10% increase since 2012)[7]. ●

The future of the European Union: Optimism on the rise

Would you say that you are very optimistic, fairly optimistic, fairly pessimistic or very pessimistic about the future of the EU? (%)

■ Total Optimistic   ■ Total Pessimistic   ■ Don't Know

Source: Standard. Eurobarometer. 87. Key trends. The European Commission.

MYTH #2: MEMBER STATES ARE UNDER A 'BRUSSELS DIKTAT'

Popular thinking: *The Brussels diktat myth is timeless and returns like a boomerang on a regular basis. Each time it is related to different issues and topics, but often refers to the bad will of a European Commission made up of unelected officials who make the lives of the member states miserable.*

Reality check: The EU is made up of its constituent sovereign states. It is true that governments pool important aspects of sovereign power within a supranational European framework. But in return they gain access to the world's most valuable single market and the free movement of people. Additionally, member states can use the EU as a platform to promote their interests and values and jointly shape EU-wide responses to challenges (such as the fight against terrorism, internet governance, environmental sustainability) which they could not possibly do on their own.

To summarise, no central sovereign EU government has replaced member states' national governments. Instead member states exercise elements of sovereign authority within a process of constant negotiation with each other and the EU institutions.

It is true that the Commission is powerful, has political leadership as well as administrative functions. But it does not run the EU. Much of the power in the EU is, in fact, held by elected governments in the European Council, Council of Ministers and the directly-elected European Parliament, which has steadily increased in power and importance with every treaty revision.

Finally, every government has bureaucrats who are by nature unelected. The EU currently has approximately 32,000 civil servants serving 500 million Europeans. By comparison, Germany (population: 82 million), the United Kingdom (65 million) and Poland (38 million) respectively employ around 315.000, 400.000 and 427.000 bureaucrats.[8] Finally, 2.6 million civil servants[9] are employed by the US government; which means that the citizen-to-civil-servant ratio of 10,000 to 1 is realistic considering the fact that the EU represent 200 million more citizens than Washington. ●

	Population	Number of civil servants
The EU	500 million	32,000
The United States	325 million	2600,000
Germany	82 million	315,000
The United Kingdom	65 million	400,000
Poland	38 million	427,000

MYTH #3: THE EUROPEAN UNION IS A 'BUREAUCRATIC MONSTER'

Popular thinking: *Criticisms that too much red tape from Brussels puts a huge burden on member states is hardly new. Concerns over the EU's excessive and 'unnecessary regulations' were consistently reinvented by the pro-Brexit camp during the referendum campaign. Some examples of extreme EU policies include a ban on bendy bananas and 30 different electrical appliances, such as vacuum cleaners, kettles, toasters and lawnmowers.*

Reality check: It is worth noting that the EU connects and manages 28 very diverse members with 24 different languages and 11 official currencies. In order to create similar (if not unified) standards, the EU often adopts directives and regulations. Given the size and diversity of the EU red tape is inevitable.

Yes, the EU regulates electrical appliances including vacuum cleaners and kettles, but it does so to increase safety and energy efficiency.[10] Moreover, when it comes to concrete regulation, the business sector is regularly consulted, particularly when it comes to new directives on electrical appliances.

Other arguments surrounding the uselessness and extremity of EU regulations are exaggerated. Yes, Brussels regulates the size and shape of bananas sold in the EU (including the bananas imported), but it does so to better classify bananas – and other fruits – as class 1 and class 2[11]. These classifications, in turn, reflect the EU's commitment to improving the quality of products of its citizens.

There is no doubt that some EU regulations are not perfect. For example, they do not prevent companies from selling lower quality food to Central European states. Czech and Hungarian studies have highlighted significant discrepancies in food ingredients in powdered milk, bread and chocolate spread sold under the same brand names across the EU.[12] However, after the V4 put more pressure on the Europe Commission, the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive was modified in order to make producers state the ingredients clearly. ●

MYTH #4: FRANCE AND GERMANY DOMINATE THE EUROPEAN UNION

Popular thinking: *France and Germany dominate the EU to such an extent that Berlin and Paris 'dictate Franco-German preferences to all other European countries'[13]. Both countries have also been accused of making deals that undermine legitimacy and cause resentment among other member states.*

Reality check: From the outset of the European project, the 'Franco-German motor' has been the driving force for integration. With a population of more than 80.5 million and 67 million respectively, France and Germany are economic powerhouses and the highest net contributors to the EU budget.[14]

However, criticisms that France and Germany make major EU policy changes on their own are wide of the mark. Decision making is, in fact, a complex process involving the European Parliament, European Commission and European Council, as well as a number of other connected institutions and agencies.[15] In the Commission, Germany and France have 1-1 Commissioner posts like every 28 member state, while in the European Parliament seats are distributed according to population, and degressive proportionality after Brexit is on the table to strengthen the representation of smaller member states. It is true that the Council is the ultimate decision-making body where leaders of the largest countries play an influential role. However, the Council makes decisions independently of the other two institutions. In addition, Germany and France are just 2 out of 28 representatives on the Council. The most sensitive matters, including EU membership, budget and Common Foreign and Security Policy questions are decided upon by unanimity. Put simply, everyone has an equal vote.

The EU also offers plenty of other platforms where member states can align their interests and build coalitions. These include regular and ad-hoc EU-level and regional working groups, conferences and seminars in European institutions and other frameworks at ministry and NGO level. However, platforms are not enough on their own to influence decision-making, with the ability to invest resources and strong leadership also playing an important role in gaining influence. Striking and effective balance between platforms and qualities has undoubtedly allowed smaller states like Austria, Belgium, Estonia and Ireland to play a key role in the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions.[16]

Small countries also manage to elevate their interests to the EU-level by working together and forming coalitions. The Visegrad 4 countries, for instance, were able to combine their strong rhetoric on illegal migration to influence the EU quota allocation policy. Cyprus has also been able to use its EU membership to push for the suspension of accession talks with Turkey.[17]

Finally, France and Germany have never set out to rule the EU in partnership with one another. Their viewpoints often differ. For example, while Germany is positive about fiscal discipline and a political union, France favours the introduction of common fiscal transfers at the EU level and is not keen on a political union.[18] This means that almost every preliminary agreement for a joint Franco-German initiative is the product of consensus which tends to be moderate by nature. ●

MYTH #5: THE EURO IS THE CAUSE OF ALL EVILS

Popular thinking: *Following the eurozone crisis, the single currency faced a lot of criticism. While some people believe the euro must be defended at all costs, others see the common currency as the cause of all evils. Eurosceptics blame the euro, among other things, for increasing the price of a baguette, lowering export capabilities, creating a housing bubble and causing the most severe financial crisis in Europe since 1929. Put simply, "the eurozone has failed (and) it was a bad experiment".[19]*
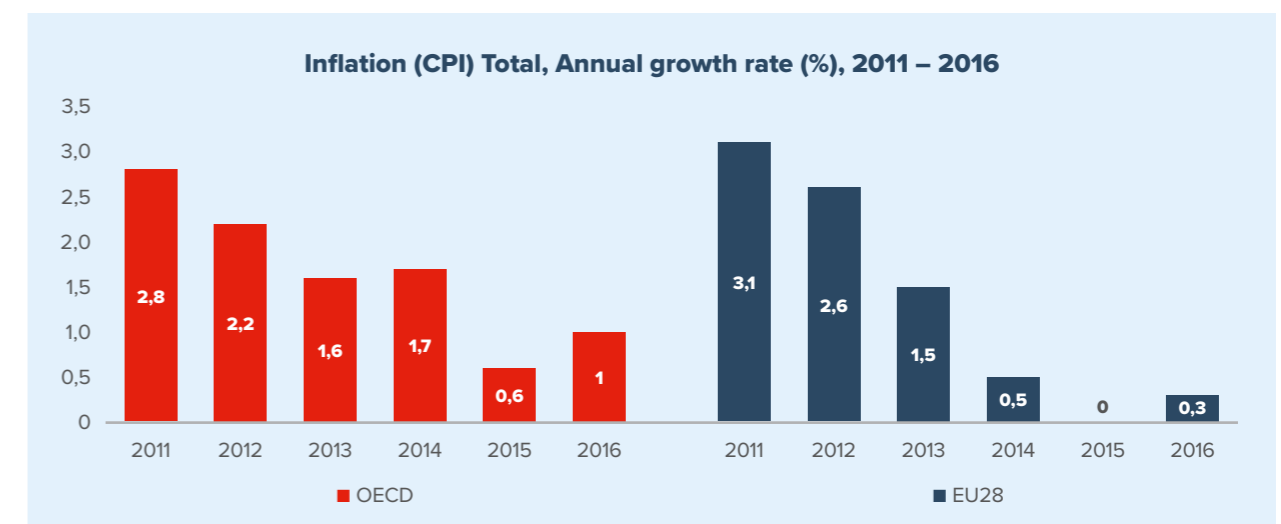
Reality check: Imagine for a while that introduction of euro was like changing the means of transport from an old bicycle into a new shiny motorbike. It can get you faster and quicker wherever you want, put you in closer touch with family and friends who live around the corner. But beware! If you drive recklessly, too fast and without a helmet, you can hurt yourself pretty badly.

To put it simply while the euro is not perfect, the European Monetary Union is by no means an economically flawed initiative. From its inception, the euro was both a political and an economic project. Additionally, it was successful in helping to create a single European identity, which is crucial to maintaining ties among member states. The euro also means closer co-operation among Member States for a stable currency and economy[20].

A single currency offers many benefits, such as citizens not having to pay charges to convert currencies when going abroad or for wiring or withdrawing money in another eurozone country. Business benefit from the absence of exchange-rate risks or transaction costs for cross-border operations. It is easier and cheaper on average to borrow money from banks or other sources.
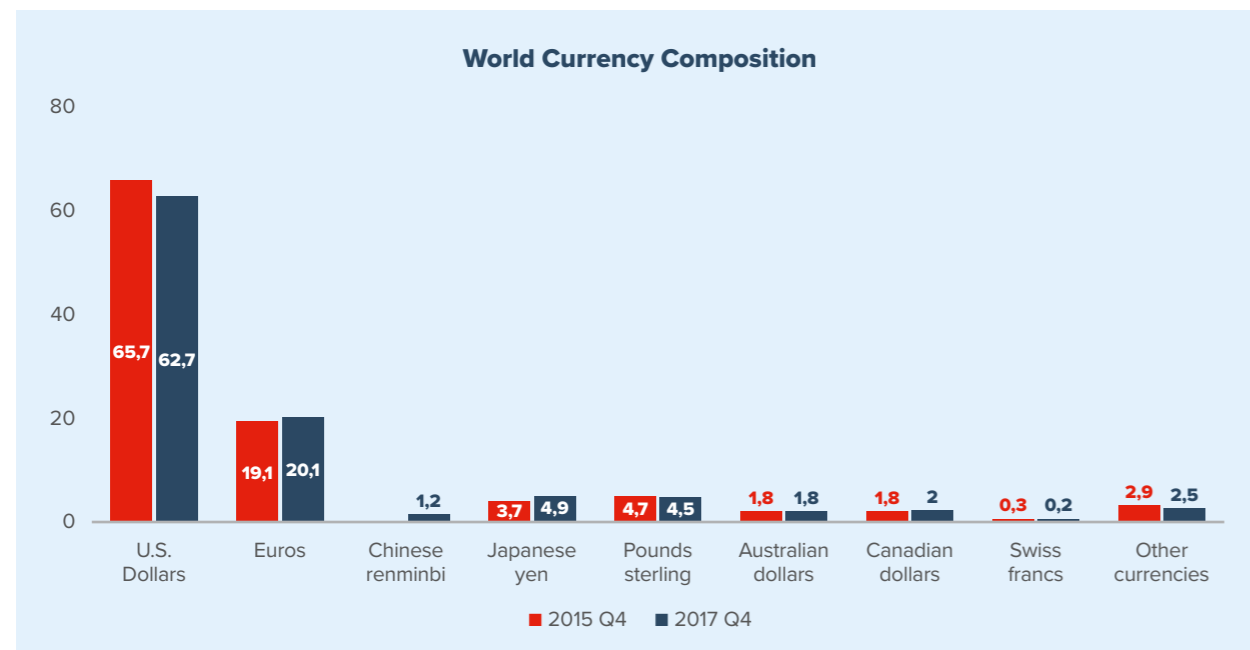
Since the introduction, the euro, helped to keep prices stable in the eurozone. Therefore, it helped to avoid the negative effects on the economy such as lose purchasing power or decline in the value of money. During this period inflation was around or below 2%, the reference value of the European Central Bank[21]. More precisely, between 2011-2016, the average inflation rate in the EU (1.5%) was slightly lower than the OECD area (1.6%). To compare, between 1961-1991, an average inflation rate in France, Germany or Spain accounted for respectively 6.6%, 3.4% and 10%.

Inflation (CPI) Total, Annual growth rate (%), 2011 – 2016

Year	OECD	EU28
2011	2,8	3,1
2012	2,2	2,6
2013	1,6	1,5
2014	1,7	0,5
2015	0,6	0
2016	1	0,3

■ OECD　■ EU28

Source: OECD, 2018[22].

The euro is not doing too bad against other currencies. Currently, it is the second most commonly held reserve currency, comprising about 20% of allocated holdings. According to the International Monetary Fund, its share steadily grew from 19% in 2015 to 20% in 2017.[23] Sixty countries and territories representing 175 million people have pegged their own currencies, either directly or indirectly, to the euro[24].

There is no doubt that the eurozone needs further reform to become more resilient to the ups and downs of the business cycle. However, adoption of the euro brings countries into the core of EU governance and provides greater opportunity to shape the agenda and participate in institutional and policy settings. Being a member of the eurozone also strengthens a country's voice in European integration processes and sets its geopolitical orientation. Finally, despite the rhetoric, the European public is in favour of the euro, with the following poll from September 2017 showing 60% in favour of the currency against 20% opposed.[25] ●

World Currency Composition

	U.S. Dollars	Euros	Chinese renminbi	Japanese yen	Pounds sterling	Australian dollars	Canadian dollars	Swiss francs	Other currencies
2015 Q4	65,7	19,1		3,7	4,7	1,8	1,8	0,3	2,9
2017 Q4	62,7	20,1	1,2	4,9	4,5	1,8	2	0,2	2,5

■ 2015 Q4   ■ 2017 Q4

Source: IMF, 2017.

MYTH #6: THE EUROPEAN UNION IS "NAÏVE" ABOUT FREE TRADE

Popular thinking: *The EU does not do enough to protect its citizens from globalisation. According to critics, the European Commission is too generous to third countries when negotiating trade deals and grants too many concessions, particularly when it comes to the agricultural sector.*

Reality check: The European Union is one of the most open economies in the world, with approximately 70 % of its imports entering on zero or reduced tariffs. Statistics show that EU consumers gain about €600 a year thanks to the increased choice in goods provided by free trade.[26] What is more, approximately 31 million jobs in Europe depend – either directly or indirectly - on the EU's ability to trade freely around the world. Put simply, one in every seven European job depends on the EU's external trade activities. Over the past year, the EU has also bolstered its free trade arrangements by concluding talks with Japan, updating five old deals (Azerbaijan, Chile, Mexico, Morocco and Tunisia), and brokering new deals with Mercosur, Australia, New Zealand and India. If finalised, current free trade agreement negotiations could increase EU GDP by more than 2% to €250 billion.

It is true that the EU has lowered its import tariffs (for which it was labelled "naïve"), but it was not alone in doing so. According to World Bank data, tariffs applied to the value of imports decreased globally between 2002-2015[27]. The average tariff applied by the European Union (5% in 2016) is still slightly higher than those applied by the United States (3.4%) or Japan (4.5%)[28]. What's consistent, however, is that some of the World's leading economies lowered tariffs around the same time.

It is also true that the European Commission makes concessions when negotiating trade deals. Striking a free trade agreement that balances the interests of a third country and the 28 EU member states would not be possible without some give and take. As the recent example of Mercosur demonstrates, the more access to industrial goods that Brussels seeks (in Germany's interest and its intra EU trade partners such as Czech Republic, Slovakia or Poland), the more Mercosur will insist on agricultural concessions (against French or Polish interests). Nevertheless, the EU is aware of the need to shape international trade to reflect member states' interests. That is why one of its priorities in is to set and shape global standards and international norms. In addition, Brussels has moved from striking 'classic' FTAs (focused on tariff cuts and trade in goods) to a new generation that include broad range of issues such as services, public procurement, investments, and regulatory cooperation. Finally, due to concerns regarding growing Chinese investments in strategic sectors in the EU (e.g. technology firms and infrastructure), the EU is planning to voluntary screen foreign investment by encouraging members to share information on possible effects on public security.

Finally, the EU does not have much choice but to play the game. Its share of the global economy is falling (from 22% in 2004 to 16% in 2016) while non-EU economies are growing at a faster rate[29]. China's share of global GDP grew from 9% in 2004 to 18% in 2016, India from 4.5% in 2004 to 7% in 2016. It is better for the EU to speak with one voice because the rising influence of emerging economies amplifies the need for collective action. Given the size of the world economies it's better for the EU to negotiate the trade deals as a block rather than member states on their own. Germany's share in the world's GDP is 3.2% but those of Poland (0.88%) or Slovakia (0.14%) are too small to compete with those China (17.7%), India (75) or Japan (4.3%)[30]. ●

Europe's share of global GDP is shrinking
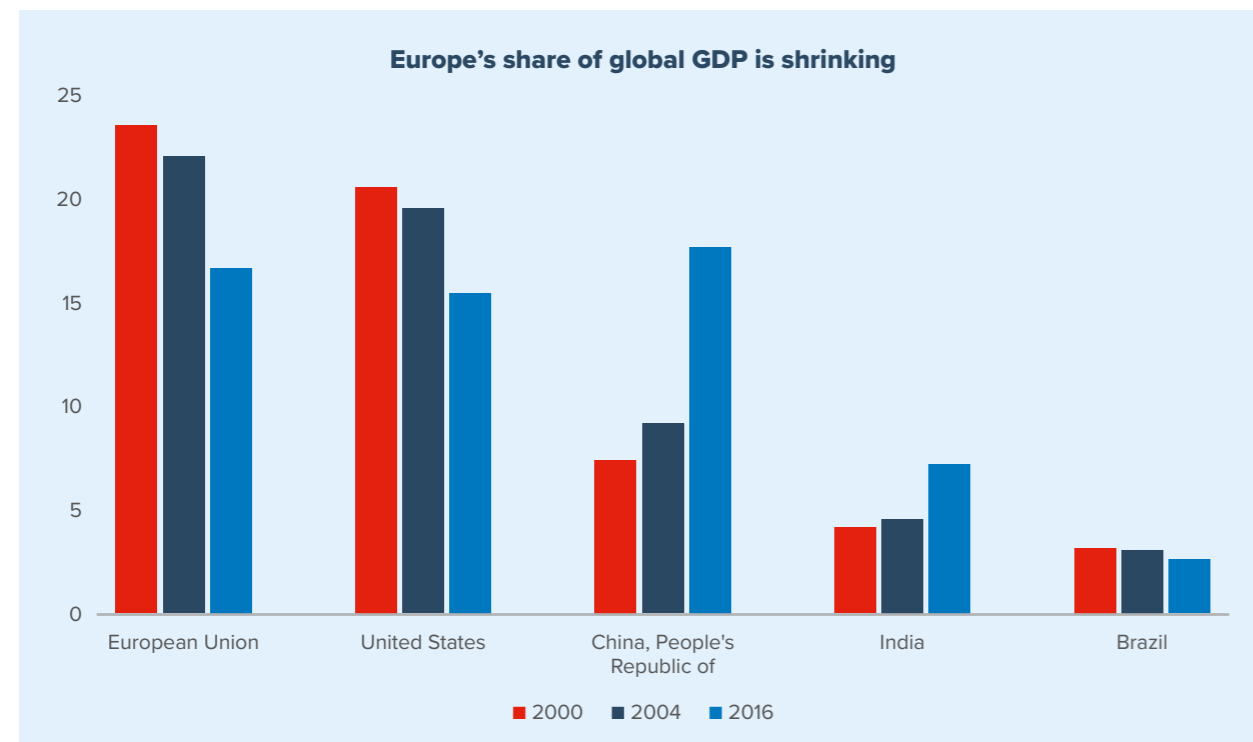
Source: IMF, 2018.

MYTH #7:
COMPLICATED PRIVACY REGULATIONS MAKE EUROPEAN BUSINESSES UNCOMPETITIVE

Popular thinking: *The EU's privacy regulations (known as General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR) are extremely complicated and difficult to implement. European companies will be so constrained that they won't be able to compete with technological innovators from around the world.*

Reality check: Privacy and consumer protection have always faced the need to balance technological innovation against business interests. However, data protection is not necessarily detrimental to business ventures. While protecting consumers, GDPR also makes business sense.

First, it standardises and streamlines data protection rules across Europe, which increases ease of operation across the EU thereby enabling companies to expand in a more efficient manner.

wealthy consumers, Europe effectively exports its privacy regulations to the rest of the world.

Third, in the wake of the scandals related to the controversial use of personal data by social media, marketing agencies, and political campaigns there is an increased push for global tech companies to extend European standards to all users. The increased attention to privacy matters and outrage of the public in the wake of the Facebook-Cambridge Analytica regulations potentially attracts more consumers to companies with a trustworthy privacy record. Transparent information about how consumer data is handled will lead to increased public confidence in the brand.

There are undoubtedly challenges associated with increased data privacy, including the potential

What does GDPR mean:

▶ standardised data protection across Europe
▶ ease of operation for companies across Europe
▶ right to obtain personal information and data and how it was used free of charge
▶ right to be forgotten: or to erase your data

Second, while stricter privacy regulations do single out the EU from the rest of the world, it does not mean that they are only applicable to European companies. All governments and businesses that work with data on EU citizens have to comply, or face fines of up to €20 million or 4% of worldwide global revenue (whichever is higher). Given the allure of a market consisting of 500 million relatively

slowdown of the development of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The availability of huge amounts of data has determined the comparative advantage of China in this area. Harvesting the data of Europeans and using it en masse will indeed not be as easy as it is in China. Furthermore, GDPR requirements mean that when a decision is made by an algorithm (for example, issuing a loan, releasing a person

on bail, or selling a type of health insurance) an individual would have a right to a review conducted by an employee/official. The introduction of the human element would in effect increase the costs of the business model.

Nonetheless, several European countries have adopted AI blueprints – with France doing so most recently - and pledged that they are compatible with GDPR. Furthermore, the EU Commission is working on a joint European approach to AI that, by pooling resources and research both in public and private spheres, aims to make the EU more globally competitive. The Commission will also put forward proposals on making data collected by public administrations available for the development of Artificial Intelligence solutions. Developing AI mechanisms that people trust and accept will in the end compensate for the initial impediments caused by the need to find solutions compatible with privacy protection demands. ●

MYTH #8:
# WE ARE EXPERIENCING THE ISLAMISATION OF EUROPE

Popular thinking: *Many Europeans believe that Islam does not belong in the EU and the Muslim faith poses a civilisational threat to Christian-Western values. This myth is nothing new. Since 2007, the Danish action group "Stop Islamisation of Europe" has committed to "prevent and reverse the implementation of sharia law in Europe".[31] In his controversial book Submission (published on the same day as the 'Charlie Hebdo' attacks in Paris) French author Michel Houellebecq, imagines a France in the near future under Islamic rule, following the election of a Muslim president.*

Reality check: It is true that the Muslim population of Europe is growing. A Pew Research Centre study shows that Europe's Muslim population increased from 19.5 million in 2010 to 25.8 million in 2016, and this trend will persist[32]. Nevertheless, Muslims will not be in the majority any time soon, and neither are we experiencing the Islamisation of Europe.

First, Muslims currently make up only 5% (as of 2016) of the entire European population with their number expected to rise to 6% by 2030. From there, Europe's Muslim population is expected to increase to an estimated 7.4% by 2050. However, this population increase is happening naturally, rather than being driven only by migration waves. Europe's Muslims have higher fertility rates (2.6) compared to its non-Muslim population (1.6).[33]

Second, Islam is an established feature of European culture and heritage. An estimated 25.4% of Cyprus' population are Muslims due to the historical presence of Turkish Cypriots in the north of the island. Significant Muslim populations can also be found in France (8.8%), Sweden (8.1%), Belgium (7.6%), the Netherlands (7.1%) and Germany (6.1%)[34]. Additionally, the EU motto "United in diversity" reflects the openness of the continent to many different cultures, traditions and languages. Rich and innovative countries are multicultural. The evidence from the United States suggests that skilled immigrants contribute to research and innovation, as well as technological progress[35].

Estimated share (%) of Muslims among total population 2016

■ Blue: >6%   ■ Red: 3-6%   ■ Green: <3%
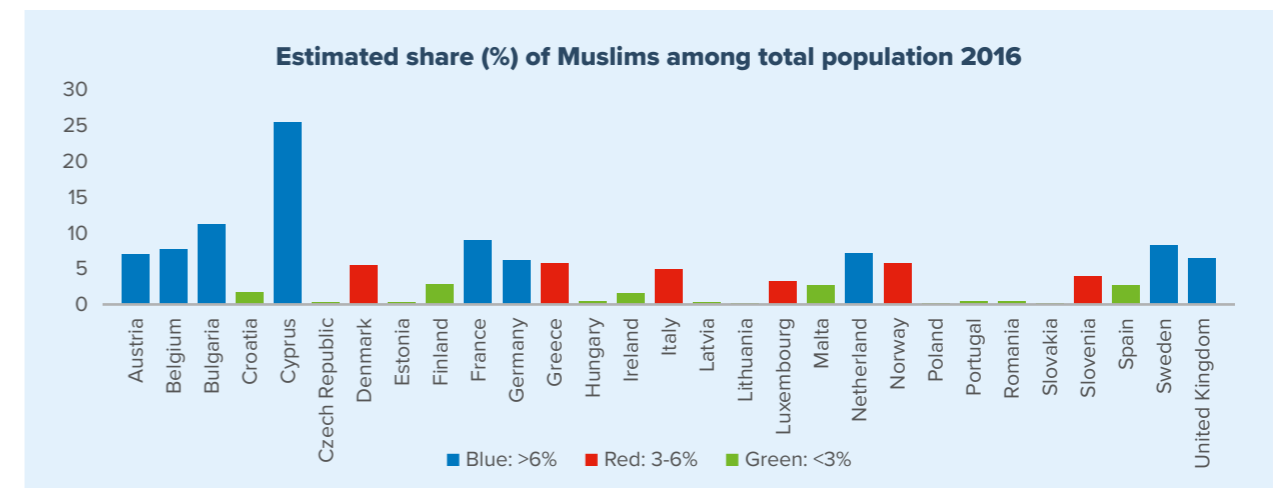
Source: Pew Research Center, 2017.

Finally, the primacy of "Christian-Western" culture in Europe is not declining because of the so-called "invasion of Muslims", but the changing fabric of European society. Recent opinion polls in twelve European countries suggest that the majority of young people do not follow any religion. For example, 91% of Czechs, 80% of Estonians, 75% of Swedes, 72% of Dutch and 67% Hungarians claim to have no religious affinities[36]. Moreover, bans on wearing burqas, niqabs or 'burkinis' in public in a number of European countries (Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain) 'suggests that we are a long way off witnessing the Islamisation of Europe. Women breaking these bans could be fined from 150 EUR in France to 1378 EUR in Belgium.[37] ●

MYTH #9: THE EUROPEAN UNION IS A PARADISE FOR REFUGEES

Popular thinking: *With its generous social benefits and willingness to welcome newcomers Europe has become a paradise for refugees. Many Europeans believe that the EU's open-door policy has encouraged too many migrants from around the world. Disgruntled by their own economic prospects following the years of austerity, worried about the growing disappearance of jobs to technology, or perturbed by the erosion of a familiar way of life, many Europeans feel abandoned by their own governments. Too much money, the logic goes, is spent on newcomers, particularly those coming for economic reasons, instead of supporting locals-in-need. They would prefer to keep migrants out of the European Union.*

Reality check: The paradox of this perception is that it is also often perpetuated among groups and individuals that pursue the opposite goal – people who view Europe as the only viable option for escaping desperate situations in their country of birth.

However, Europe is often 'paradise lost' for refugees and migrants arriving to Europe, if it ever existed in the first place. Migration and asylum policies, including support provided to refugees and rates of recognition, differ across the continent. But even in the most desired destinations, the fortunes of asylum seekers differ greatly from what is imagined.

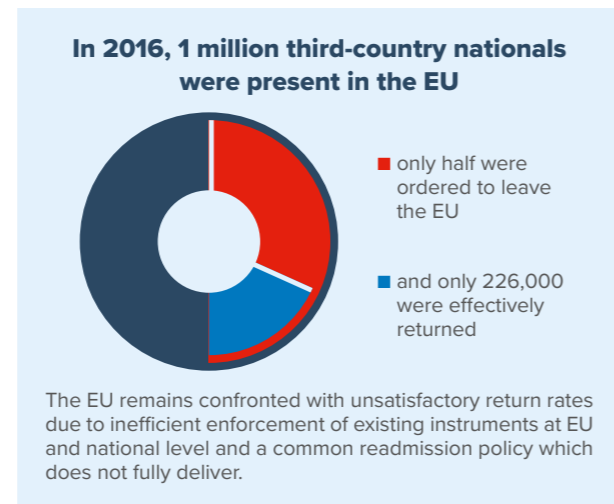| Benefits for asylum seekers |
|---|
| **Estonia** ▶ Allowance of 90 euros per month but asylum seekers must pay for meals. Clothes are provided.
 ▶ On approval, applicants receive access to integration programs and the right to the same benefits as permanent residents, including welfare and pension. |
| **France** ▶ Allowance of around 343 euros per month during application procedures. Asylum seekers can apply for housing. The allowance is to cover food expenses, but food banks are often available.
 ▶ Free health insurance while the application is being reviewed.
 ▶ No work permit for the first 12 months. |
| **Hungary** ▶ Starting from the second month, asylum seekers receive 7,125 forints (22 euros) per month in cash, which amounts to about a tenth of the average unemployment benefit.
 ▶ If an asylum request is approved, the person can stay for two more months in the reception camp keeping the same benefits. Some financial support and housing subsidies are available to those who sign an "integration contract". |
| **Italy** ▶ No work permit until asylum is granted, or during first six months, whichever comes first.
 ▶ For each person in housing, 35 euros/day is allocated but most of this goes to the reception centres to cover food and shelter. Asylum seekers receive 2.50 euros per day as pocket money. Some centres provide language classes.
 ▶ Once an application is approved, permission to stay is issued for one, three or five years, without provision of cash or housing. |

While asylum seekers do receive support, it varies greatly between EU member states and hardly guarantees a carefree existence. Most of the support comes in-kind in the form of food, housing in designated facilities, or health insurance. In most countries, work permits are only issued after asylum has been granted, which might take months. Individuals granted subsidiary protection are typically entitled to an even lower level of support, which often excludes the right to bring their families to the country granting asylum.

Member states have started or are proposing to cut support to asylum seekers, including countries like Austria and Denmark. When taking into consideration the lack of social networks in a new country, poor language skills, traumatic past, and prejudice among the local population when it comes to housing or job search, the limited temporal state support hardly makes them better-off than nationals in difficult situations even when welfare provisions are comparable to those given to the citizens of the hosting state.
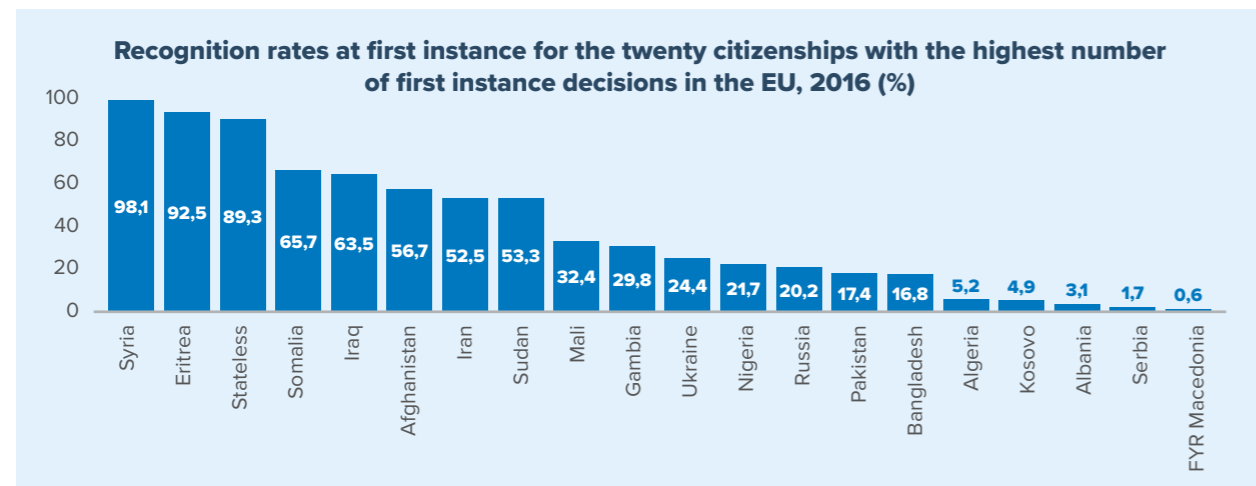
Contrary to popular belief, not every person arriving to the EU and applying for protected status will receive it. Of the 650,000 asylum seekers who applied for protection for the first time in 2017, only 46% received a positive first instance decision (refugee, subsidiary protection, or permission to stay for humanitarian reasons).[38] Moreover, recognition rates differ between member states and are, to a large extent, dependent on the applicant's country of origin. Ireland (89%), Lithuania (78%), and Latvia (74%) recorded the highest shares

of positive first instance asylum decisions in 2017, while Czechia, Poland, and France recorded the highest rejections rates (+70%). Syrians, the largest group to receive protection in the EU since 2013, also have the highest rate of recognition.

It is true that returns are slow. But the numbers and attention to the matter is increasing. Most unsuccessful applicants, in addition to other foreign nationals who entered or are staying irregularly, are ordered to leave the EU. It is true that not all the 400-500 thousand who are ordered to leave every year do so. On average, the return rate is around 40%[39], with 2015 and 2016 witnessing increases in absolute numbers of returns.[40] The EU Commission and member states acknowledge the fact that the rate of returns is lower than desired and are actively developing new measures to support an efficient and humane return policy. ●

In 2016, 1 million third-country nationals were present in the EU

■ only half were ordered to leave the EU

■ and only 226,000 were effectively returned

The EU remains confronted with unsatisfactory return rates due to inefficient enforcement of existing instruments at EU and national level and a common readmission policy which does not fully deliver.

Source: The European Commission, 2017.[41]

Recognition rates at first instance for the twenty citizenships with the highest number of first instance decisions in the EU, 2016 (%)

Syria	98,1
Eritrea	92,5
Stateless	89,3
Somalia	65,7
Iraq	63,5
Afghanistan	56,7
Iran	52,5
Sudan	53,3
Mali	32,4
Gambia	29,8
Ukraine	24,4
Nigeria	21,7
Russia	20,2
Pakistan	17,4
Bangladesh	16,8
Algeria	5,2
Kosovo	4,9
Albania	3,1
Serbia	1,7
FYR Macedonia	0,6

Source: Eurostat, 2016.

MYTH #10:
REFUGEES ARE THE MAIN CAUSE OF TERRORIST ATTACKS IN EUROPE

Popular thinking: *Multiple terrorist attacks in Europe have exacerbated concerns that terrorists take advantage of the relatively lax entry procedures for refugees to penetrate European borders. These worries were first amplified by the fact that some of the 2015 Paris attackers posed as refugees to enter Europe with allegedly fake Syrian passports. Europe needs to stop accepting refugees to prevent terrorism.*

Reality check: The fear that terrorists exploit the asylum system for nefarious purposes is to some extent justifiable. However, simply closing the doors to refugees will not make Europe safer.

It has been proven that asylum seekers have been involved in terror attacks in the years following the 2015 crisis, including, for example, in Würzburg, Ansbach, the Berlin Christmas market (all in Germany in 2016) and in Stockholm in April 2017. Three of the perpetrators had their requests for asylum rejected, while one was awaiting a decision on his application.

Nonetheless, terrorist attacks in Europe have been overwhelmingly committed by European citizens. Although many have a migrant background, terrorists in Europe have typically been domestic in origin with only small minority of cases traced back to the latest refugee wave. Daesh is indeed known to utilise the migrant crisis for its purposes, including infiltrating migration flows. The routes, however, have primarily been used to return foreign fighters to European countries. The fact that these are Europeans who went to Syria to fight on the side of Daesh before returning shows that the terrorist problem is already inside Europe and not imported by refugees.

In a project that analyses the profiles of individuals arrested in 2015 on terror charges, GLOBSEC has so far determined that 88% of arrestees spent their lives in EU states, with 77% having an EU citizenship.[42]

Importantly, the successful execution of terrorist attacks both prior to and after the 2015 refugee crisis relied on the appeal of the thriving Daesh and the pre-existing networks in Europe. Put simply, the plotters did not need a refugee wave to stage attacks on European soil. Hence, without addressing the allure of Daesh or incapacitating terrorist networks already present in Europe, the attacks will continue regardless of whether Europe accepts refugees or not.

Moreover, rejecting all people in dire need of safety because of a disproportionately low risk of terrorist attacks by a handful of refugees would not only mean reneging on Europe's moral obligations or renouncing the benefits of having a younger and more diverse society but might also lead to more pronounced security problems.[43]

Sowing hatred towards refugees and fuelling xenophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment across Europe plays into Daesh's and is exactly what it wants. Closing Europe off to refugees strengthens the group's argument that the Caliphate is the only alternative for millions of refugees who are unwelcome elsewhere. Millions of desperate people, who previously fled Daesh, are pushed to support and fight for it and commit the very acts of extreme violence that Europe is seeking to protect itself from. Walling Europe off from refugees will not eradicate the terrorist threat. On the contrary, it might increase it.

Instead of shutting the doors to refugees entirely, Europe should work on eliminating gaps in the asylum system that are currently being abused. These include enhancing migration management, improving border protection, increasing resettlement numbers from Turkey and elsewhere to allow for better and orderly vetting, and working on proper integration support and community engagement to avoid the radicalization of refugees who come to Europe and turn into marginalized outcasts. The EU and individual member states have already started to implement new measures and enhancing existing schemes in all these areas. For example, EU-level agencies are engaged in supporting states in countering the penetration of borders by Daesh agents. In 2016, Europol announced the recruitment of up to 200 counter-terrorist investigators to be deployed to migration hotspots in Greece and other countries. Their task is to identify suspected terrorists and criminals.[44] Another example of migration management policies that allow for better security vetting while fulfilling humanitarian obligations is the new resettlement scheme. Put forward by the EU Commission in 2017, it is designed for accepting at least 50,000 refugees from other countries. ●

MYTH #11: THE EUROPEAN UNION SUFFERS FROM TERRORISM BECAUSE WE ARE TOO SOFT ON EXTREMISTS

Popular thinking: *The EU has experienced (and will continue to experience) more terrorist attacks because its laws are too soft, too bureaucratic and focus on the human rights of terrorists to the detriment of internal security. Many of the attackers and accomplices involved in the Brussels and Paris attacks were on terrorist watchlists but nonetheless roamed freely before killing hundreds of people. All that is needed is to crack down on radicals and suspected terrorists before they commit an attack and punish them harsher to deter others.*

Reality check: The deterrence effect attributed to reactionary laws and punishment (or lack of) is only one of the factors that needs to be addressed to tackle terrorism. It is not necessarily the "softness" of European law enforcement that allowed attacks to happen but gaps in the system and lack of cooperation between security and intelligence agencies across member states and even within the same country. Furthermore, there are external factors that make Europe susceptible to terrorism, such as the success and appeal of Daesh to some Europeans and the existence of developed terrorist networks that often overlap with criminal ones.

Since the escalation of the terror threat in 2015, Europe has moved in a more repressive direction and is better prepared to plug the gaps in the security apparatus by improving coordination and intelligence sharing.

Examples of toughened laws	
France	▶ Passed legislation that allows the seizure of IDs and passports from potential jihadists ▶ House searches and confining individuals to their homes made easier and does not require judicial approval in some cases ▶ Places of worship can be shut down if preachers are found to promote radical ideologies
UK	▶ Tougher sentencing for planning or helping to plan terrorist attacks, including plots at very early stages ▶ Tougher sentencing for accessing or distributing extremist materials online
Belgium	▶ "Plan Canal" aims to tackle radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism in several Brussels municipalities. Police presence in these areas will increase. The government will invest in new surveillance technologies with special attention to (Islamic) "places of worship"
Germany	▶ Law enforcement agencies can insert into cell phones and computers spy software (Trojan Horse) to access data in encrypted messaging services such as Skype or WhatsApp.

First, many European countries have introduced harsher laws to crack down on suspected terrorists and European citizens who travelled to Syria to fight for Daesh before attempting to return home. Moreover, there is a growing trend in Europe to deport more people (without judicial review) who are flagged as national security risks, with Italy having a notable track record for implementing this measure.

These laws will, among other things, lead to more prison terms and harsher sentences. But locking up extremists often contributes to the problem rather than solving it. Prisons have become fertile breeding grounds for radicalisation and recruitment. Disproportionate counterterrorism measures singling out religious or ethnic groups are also an important radicalisation factor to begin with.
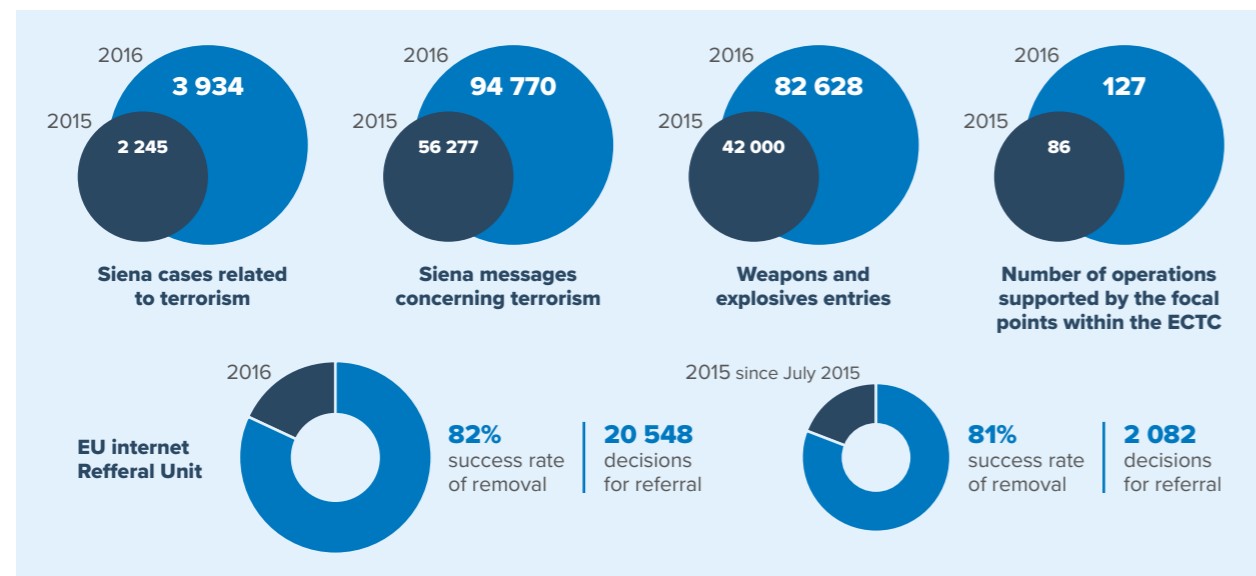
Second, to counteract this effect and prevent terrorists from recruiting more followers, European countries have adopted new counterterror measures and enhanced existing anti-radicalisation programmes. France has introduced the "Prevent to Protect" initiative to combat radicalisation in its education and prison systems.[45] Teachers will be trained to identify radicalisation at an early stage and students will be taught how to distinguish between facts and propaganda.

Many countries have developed guidelines on the removal of extremist and terrorist content from the internet or preventing terrorists from recruiting on social media. The UK government has invested public funds to develop an artificial intelligence tool that detects and blocks extremist content. This will also be made available for small tech companies who cannot afford to develop their own solutions.[46]

Finally, there is consensus across Europe that more efficient information sharing between and within countries is crucial for preventing terrorism. To this end, the establishment of the European Counter-Terrorism Centre (ECTC) at Europol has contributed to "all-time high" levels of information sharing. The Centre has also facilitated closer cooperation on 127 counter-terrorism operations.[47] In this respect, the GLOBSEC Intelligence Reform Initiative offers additional food for thought. The Initiative proposes the creation of permanent hubs that link relevant security specialists; the development of "hit-no-hit" single search interfaces to enable real time information exchange; and establishing intelligence centres of excellence to develop common risk assessments, standards and training.[48]

European states are also working on aligning their internal agencies. This includes countries that are not directly affected by jihadi terrorism but are often used as routes for weapons smuggling or the passage of fighters. Poland, for example, aims to change the command of its special police units to allow better coordination, preparation and implementation of counter-terrorism activities.[49] ●

Siena cases related to terrorism
2016: 3 934
2015: 2 245

Siena messages concerning terrorism
2016: 94 770
2015: 56 277

Weapons and explosives entries
2016: 82 628
2015: 42 000

Number of operations supported by the focal points within the ECTC
2016: 127
2015: 86

EU internet Refferal Unit
2016: 82% success rate of removal — 20 548 decisions for referral
2015 since July 2015: 81% success rate of removal — 2 082 decisions for referral

Source: Europol, 2017[50].

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