

Thank you very much. Let me start by expressing my thanks for being invited to participate in this very interesting conference. The issues discussed here today could not be more topical.

I would like to talk to you today about border control. It is a topic that plays a rather large role in the political debate in Denmark as well as in a lot of other European countries at the moment. And rightly so.

For my party – The Danish People's Party – border control has been a key issue since the founding of the party 21 years ago. Especially so since Denmark joined Schengen. More about that later.

First, let me state clearly that I am very much in favor of border control. I believe that controlling and guarding one's border is a central and very natural part of being a sovereign nation. Nations have borders, and those borders need to be guarded. It is common sense.

I am not talking about walling yourself off from the rest of the world. Denmark has historically been a small, open economy depending on trade and commerce with other nations. And we will continue to be so in the future. There is no contradiction between protecting your borders and being an open economy.

Since March 2001 Denmark has been a part of Schengen. As you know, the Schengen agreement abolished the borders within the European Union, while strengthening the outer borders of the Union. A nice idea on paper perhaps, but very problematic in reality.

First off, only one of the basic ideas of Schengen has ever been realized. The abolishment of the internal borders. The external borders have never been sufficiently strengthened. The refugee and migrant crisis of recent years has very clearly demonstrated this.

Secondly, even without the recent – and ongoing – refugee and migrant crisis the Danish people have experienced a lot of negative consequences of the open borders. Crime, illegal immigration, the threat of terrorism et cetera. In many ways, the borderless Europe has been a disaster for the citizens of Europe.

And – importantly – the Danish people were never allowed a vote on this issue. It was a grave error to abolish the Danish border without asking permission from the Danish people first. Obviously, The Danish People's Party has been highly critical of this decision.

I recognize that there has been economic benefits from the internal market. But somehow, the free migration of people, trade and services has been turned into to some sort of religious principle in the EU system. It is no longer about common sense and trading together. It is a holy concept that must not be challenged no matter the cost. And the cost to the people of Europe has been very high indeed, as the ongoing refugee and migrant crisis has shown all too well.

That sort of thinking lies at the heart of the rising skepticism towards the European Union. The bureaucracy and the political elite in the European Union have lost touch with the European people.

I've mentioned the refugee and migrant crisis a few times already. I'd like to talk about that a little. We have witnessed streams of refugees and migrants on a scale that has the potential to change Europe forever, if we do not gain some semblance of control over the situation. This especially poses problems for a small country such as Denmark with a large, tax-financed welfare state characterized by a large degree of trust among the citizens and – to a smaller extent, perhaps – towards the government. The influx of a large number of people with a very different cultural outlook and values and often without the required qualifications to meaningfully contribute to our complex, knowledge-based economy is a serious challenge. Economically, as many studies show, but socially and culturally as well.

The formation of parallel societies, where Danish values have not taken hold is an increasingly important and troubling issue. Parts of Denmark that are not really a part of Denmark in some respects. All too often characterized by unemployment and a disproportionate amount of people receiving government subsidies. By anti-western values and too often the threat of radicalization and even terrorism, as we tragically experienced in Copenhagen in February of last year.

And sadly this development is not just a problem in Denmark. No European country has figured out how to successfully integrate large numbers of people from African and Middle Eastern countries.

In Denmark we have a concept called “sammenhængskraft”. An English translation might be “cohesion”, but that doesn’t quite do it justice. It’s about what ties the people of a community together. It has to do with trust, and with the belief that everybody – more or less – contributes to the community, the welfare state, as best they can.

In Denmark we have historically had a high degree of “sammenhængskraft”. I believe that that is an important part of the explanation of why Danes are usually very high on the list of the most happy people in the world. But that can change if there is a belief – and the reality – that an increasing number of people do not adequately contribute, and do in a lot of ways not really wish to be part of the Danish community.

So, we need to protect our countries from the adverse effects of unregulated immigration. Strict immigration policies and border control are essential parts of this effort.

Naturally, people are fleeing from the tragic war in Syria and other conflicts. But to a large extent we are not dealing with a Syrian refugee crisis – although we are also dealing with that. No, we are dealing with waves of mass migration of people seeking a better life that will continue for years to come. At some point last year, EU Commissioner Frans Timmermans concluded that sixty percent of the refugees entering the EU were in fact “economic refugees”, and had no basis for applying for asylum in the EU. That’s an important fact to get straight. I do not blame people for wanting to seek a better life. That is perfectly rational.

And people fleeing from war and terror need our help. But I believe that to a much larger extent than today, we need to provide this help and protection in the areas closer to where the refugees are coming from. Not by transporting large numbers of people from Africa and the Middle East to our countries with the serious negative consequences already mentioned. We have an obligation to help, but we are not obligated to severely damage our own countries in the process.

In the autumn of 2015 large numbers of refugees and migrants travelled through Europe and crossed the Danish-German border. Many on their way to Sweden or Finland. The images of migrants walking on Danish highways with the authorities seemingly having lost control was in many ways a watershed moment. If people had not realized the seriousness of the situation before, they certainly did now.

Shortly thereafter, even the Swedish government, which along with chancellor Merkel in Germany had hereto in the most irresponsible manner imaginable actively been encouraging migrants to travel to Europe and Sweden, had seemingly reached its limits, and established border control and ID-checks between Sweden and Denmark. The Danish government immediately followed suit, and established temporary border control on the border between Denmark and Germany. Finally. The border should never have been abolished in the first place, if you ask me.

To the very last minute, before at long last reestablishing border control the liberal government and most other parties in the Danish parliament had stubbornly argued that border control would cripple Danish businesses, and in fact lead to more asylum seekers!

These ridiculous arguments have since been exposed for what they are: Scare tactics with no basis in reality! Danish businesses have not suffered any serious inconvenience because of the tightened control on

the border. Export hasn't plummeted, and goods aren't rotting away on trucks standing still in long traffic queues.

And what about the number of asylum seekers?

A little recent Danish political history is in order here. Through out the 90's the number of asylum seekers rose steadily with a Social Democratic government in place. From 2001 to 2011, where we had a liberal and conservative government depending on the support of The Danish People's Party, we were able to tighten immigration policy, and successfully reduce the number of asylum seekers. That unfortunately changed again, when the Social Democrats returned to power between 2011 and 2015 with the support of a coalition of socialist parties. The numbers predictably went up again.

That continued of course with the refugee and migrant crisis. 21.000 asylum seekers arrived in Denmark in 2015, and the forecast for 2016 stood at 25.000. Huge numbers for a country such as Denmark. Especially considering that we had managed to get the number down to a few thousand per year during the last years of the first decade of the new millennium.

The forecast has since been downgraded to 10.000 asylum seekers this year. Still a large number. Too large. But our policy of border control and tighter immigration policy is clearly working. Aided of course also by other countries in Europe, Austria for example, also doing the right thing and patrolling their borders once again. We have experienced several weeks with less than 100 asylum seekers coming to Denmark. The lowest level since 2012.

We must continue on this course.

At the moment there is a big political debate in Denmark about the future of the Danish economy. The government has presented a 2025-plan outlining their vision for the next decade. The Danish People's Party, obviously, has also presented our ideas.

And we focus on continuing on the course we are on now. We must take back control of our country, and keep strengthening our laws and our border. It must be up to us to decide, who we allow to live in our country. We have presented our top priorities, and I will briefly talk about some of them.

1. We want permanent and more effective border control.
2. We want to process all asylum applications on the border. And return asylum seekers that have arrived from a safe country. You cannot reasonably claim to be fleeing for your life if you have passed through five or six safe countries to get to Denmark.
3. We want to make a plan for the eventual repatriation of every asylum seeker, who has a temporary residence permit, and everyone who has arrived in Denmark as a result of family reunification. It shall be a guiding principle in our asylum policies that you receive help and protection in Denmark on a temporary basis. If and when the situation in your homeland improves for the better, you are to return home.

We believe that these steps are crucial in curbing migration and taking back control. And without this, the many other attempts at securing and improving the Danish economy and the Danish welfare state might very well be in vain.

Thank you for listening. I'll be happy to take your questions.