

PRESS RELEASE

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EFC Conference highlights foundations' role in tackling poverty

“Fighting Poverty – Creating Opportunities” was the main theme of the European Foundation Centre's 20th annual conference, which took place in Rome from 14 to 16 May. The event attracted the participation of around 700 delegates from more than 60 countries, who took part in sessions addressing a wide range of issues relating to different aspects of poverty.

The Conference was opened by the President of the Italian Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, who said that the fight against poverty requires *“motivation and mobilisation at all levels”* and *“a wide involvement of actors, resources and energies which go well beyond the sphere of state action”*. He described foundations as being *“an essential ingredient of working liberal democracies”* as well as *“engines of pluralism”*. He said: *“foundations can, both individually and as a system, contribute to the dynamism of a society and to preserving its cohesion”*.

President Napolitano spoke about the need to combine action against poverty with measures to tackle various forms of exclusion. He warned that *“the risk of translating diversity into a factor of exclusion is always present, aggravated by the rise of a public rhetoric which does not hesitate – also here, in Italy – to include intolerant or xenophobic overtones.”* Napolitano's remarks were widely reported in the Italian press, which placed them in the context of ongoing political debates around the treatment of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants by the Italian authorities.

Many Conference participants expressed an interest in making some kind of response to show their strong agreement with the sentiments expressed by President Napolitano. This became especially clear at the second plenary session: a panel discussion of the links between Migration and Poverty, which focused in particular on the plight of undocumented migrants in the European Union.

The Conference Statement, drafted by EFC members and approved with enthusiastic applause at the closing plenary session, strongly encourages the governments of all member states *“to work individually, together and with the institutions of the European Union to build a framework for addressing migration in ways that truly respect the dignity of all human beings as defined in the European Convention on Human Rights.”* [see the full statement below]

The global financial crisis and its consequences – both for foundations and for society as a whole – was a common thread running through many sessions. Delegates shared experiences of how their foundations have been affected by the consequences of the global financial crisis, leading to difficult decisions about their grantmaking and investment policies, as well as - in some cases - significant cuts to operating budgets. However, many foundations, especially those working with disadvantaged communities in Europe and other parts of the world, are determined to maintain or even increase their efforts to provide support for projects and activities that meet the needs of those who are worst affected by the economic downturn and its negative social impacts.

At the closing session on 16 May, **The 2009 Raymond Georis Prize for Innovative Philanthropy** was awarded to Ms Güler Sabanci, President of the Sabanci Foundation. Based in Istanbul, [The Sabanci Foundation](#) was created in 1974 as Turkey's first strategic grantmaking foundation, focusing on addressing the needs of women, youth and persons with disabilities.

The first prize in the EFC Photo Competition 2009 (“Every Picture Tells A Story”) was won by a photograph entitled “Homework in Peace”, which shows a child in Nepal focusing on private study in very humble surroundings. The photo was taken by Björn Hofmann, who received a fellowship from the [Robert Bosch Foundation](#) to take part in a project that provides education to children in Nepal.

Selected highlights of the Rome Conference, including excerpts of key speeches, can be seen and heard by means of the video blog that is available on the EFC's website (www.efc.be).

European Foundation Centre (EFC)

Conference Statement - Rome, 16 May 2009

We as participants at the Annual Conference of the European Foundation Centre are delighted to have met in Rome. Our conference addressed issues of poverty and social exclusion. We were very encouraged by the speech of the President of the Republic of Italy, Giorgio Napolitano, at the opening session of our conference, during which he warned about the growing dangers of xenophobia and intolerance. However, it is with great regret that we witness the emergence of a climate in Italy, which is symptomatic of a general trend throughout Europe, which leads to measures relating to undocumented migrants that undermine people's basic human rights.

We recognise that migration is a complex and challenging issue for all European member states. As members of Foundations, we are committed to a Europe which is inclusive and tolerant; we work for this alongside citizens and civil society organisations, as well as with governmental bodies. We strongly encourage the governments of all member states to work individually, together and with the institutions of the European Union to build a framework for addressing migration in ways that truly respect the dignity of all human beings as defined in the European Convention on Human Rights.

For more information

For more information about the **EFC Conference 2009**, please see www.efc.be/aga

[Read the Press Release issued by the EFC on 14 May 2009 \(pdf\)](#) (includes the full text of the speech by President Napolitano to the opening session of the EFC Conference in Rome on 14 May)

[Visit the video blog where you can watch highlights from the EFC Conference in Rome](#)

[The Raymond Georis Prize for Innovative Philanthropy](#)

[The EFC Photo Competition "Every Picture Tells A Story"](#)

The Network of European Foundations for Innovative Cooperation (NEF) has published a mapping exercise which looks at funding for actions against poverty in the European Union. It can be downloaded from the NEF website: www.nefic.org/documents.php

In case you have any questions about the **European Foundation Centre** please contact:
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Notes to Editors

- The European Foundation Centre (EFC), founded in 1989, is the leading membership association representing public-benefit foundations at European level. It is based in Brussels
- The EFC currently has 237 members including community and independent foundations as well as corporate funders spread across 40 countries. A majority (86%) are based in Europe.
- The EFC has established a range of Interest Groups and Forums which facilitate cooperation and exchanges of good practice among members across a wide range of fields of activity including: diversity, migration and integration; human rights and disability; protecting the environment; HIV/AIDS; global health challenges; social investment; central and eastern Europe.
- The EFC hosts the secretariat of **Donors and Foundations' Networks in Europe (DAFNE)**, which supports cooperation among national networks covering 22 European countries.
- The EFC coordinates the **European Forum on Philanthropy and Research Funding**, which was launched in 2007 with the support of the European Commission and other partners.
- For more information about the EFC and its members please see: www.efc.be

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