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MEPs see role for foundations in shaping EU policy

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Foundations should play a key role in designing the EU's new 'Europe 2020' strategy designed to boost employment and economic growth, according to a survey of MEPs presented in Brussels as part of European Foundation Week.

Background

The poll, conducted this spring by Gallup in conjunction with the European Foundation Centre (EFC), was presented in Brussels on 2 June during the first ever [European Foundations Week](#) (31 May-4 June).

The aim of the Gallup/EFC [survey](#) was to get an idea of MEPs' perception and knowledge of foundations and canvass opinion on potential legislative action in the field, including on a European Foundation Statute.

European Foundation Week, hosted by the EFC, gathered over 1,000 representatives of foundations and non-profit organisations for debates and exhibitions on the work of foundations and their efforts to tackle the social issues facing Europe and the world today.

There are an estimated 110,000 foundations active in Europe. Collectively they employ around a million people and spend between €83-150m every year on various projects and programmes.

70% of European Parliament members believe foundations should contribute to drawing up the EU 2020 agenda, the [survey](#) found.

But MEPs were unsure exactly how they expected foundations to fulfil this role, with only four in 10 (41%) agreeing to elaborate further.

Of those who did, 45% said foundations should help boost EU objectives like socio-economic development, equal opportunities, the green agenda and innovation, and a third (35%) said they should feed the debate.

A total of 92 MEPs responded to the survey, which was carried out by Gallup in conjunction with the European Foundation Centre (EFC) in February and March 2010.

About two-thirds of MEPs who participated (68%) claimed to have a good overall knowledge of foundations, while just over a third (36%) said that they had worked for a foundation as a staff member, board member or volunteer.

Around eight in 10 of the MEPs who responded (78%) said they were "sometimes or regularly" in contact with foundations during the course of their parliamentary activities, while four in 10 (41%) said this happened "regularly".

However, MEPs' seemingly high level of engagement with foundations should be treated with caution given the low level of participation.

Given that just 92 of a total of 736 MEPs participated, it can reasonably be assumed that those who took the time to respond were already interested in the work of foundations, the researchers pointed out.

Indeed, even among the respondents, one in five (22%) said they had "never or rarely" come into contact with foundations during their time in the European Parliament.

Role of foundations

Asked what they considered to be the primary role played by foundations, 62% said it was to pilot new policy initiatives, while 51% singled out helping underprivileged groups in society.

Just over a quarter of MEPs (27%) said that they had been the beneficiary of a scholarship, fellowship, award or grant from a foundation, while one in eight members (13%) said that they had established a foundation themselves.

Respondents below the age of 50 were more likely to have worked for a foundation than their older counterparts (45% and 31%, respectively).

MEPs from the EU's new member states were nearly twice as likely to have received a scholarship, fellowship, award or grant from a foundation (41% compared to 22% of participating MEPs from the EU 15).

Meanwhile, members from new member states were five times more likely to have established a foundation than respondents from the EU 15 (30% and 6% respectively).

MEPs across party lines identified the public good as the concept they most closely associate with foundations (63%-70%). Survey respondents also appreciated foundations for their expertise and as incubators of ideas (both 43%).

About three-quarters of those surveyed (73%) declared that they would support a proposal for a European Foundation Statute, while just over 8 in 10 (83%) MEPs would be interested in meeting foundations active in their fields of competence, the researchers found.

Next Steps

- **31 May-4 June:** European Foundations Week.

Links

Think tanks & Academia

- Gallup/European Foundation Centre: [European Foundations Survey: Survey among MEPs](#)
- [European Foundation Week](#)
- [European Foundation Centre](#)