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Young people's regard for the EU is greater than their propensity to vote

Gütersloh (ots) -

Young Europeans largely take a positive view of the European Union. They are nevertheless less motivated than the older population groups to participate in the European Elections, according to a new "eupinions" poll. Civil rights and combating climate change are of particular significance to them.

Young people from the age of 16 in several EU countries will for the first time be able to cast their votes in the European Elections between Thursday June 6 and Sunday June 9. Many first-time voters are expected to use the opportunity to make use of their right to vote. Overall in Europe, the willingness on the part of young people to vote appears to lag that of the older population. This emerges from fresh data assessed by eupinions, the Bertelsmann Stiftung's European opinion research tool. Some 59 per cent of those polled across the EU between the ages of 16 and 25 say they intend to cast their ballots in the elections to the EU Parliament. 24 per cent remain undecided. By contrast, 65 per cent of those polled between the ages of 26 and 69 indicate that they intend to vote. In this group, 22 per cent have not yet decided.

This lower motivation is surprising, insofar as young people are fundamentally more pro-European than their older fellow citizens. Asked whether they would vote for their country to remain in the EU in a referendum, 78 per cent of the 16 to 25 age group answered in the affirmative. The figure is just 65 per cent with the older people surveyed. Moreover, the younger people polled appear to be happier with the way that democracy functions in the European Union (69 to 55 per cent).

"Many young people take the EU for granted, but simultaneously underestimate their own scope for influence. For their priorities in to play a role in EU politics, it is paramount that they get involved – by voting, writing to their representatives and engaging in parties and civil society," Bertelsmann Stiftung project managers Anne Meisiek and Etienne Höra believe.

There is no pronounced protest attitude among young people ahead of the European Elections, at least not in Germany. Polled for their reasons for voting in the EU elections, only 23 per cent say that they aim to express their disapproval of current politics through voting. By contrast, 30 per cent of the 26 to 69 age group see themselves in the protest camp. Support for the political party that they feel attached to represents the biggest motivation for both younger and older voters. In each case, half of those polled answered accordingly.

What is noticeable by comparison with the older generations is that young people regard particular political areas as more significant. While both groups see the EU's most important task as ensuring peace – around 60 per cent in each case – major differences show up on other issues. Young Europeans place considerably greater value on safeguarding civil rights and combating climate change. Attitudes to migration diverge most strongly: Whereas almost half of the older people polled expect better control of immigration from the EU, this issue plays a central role for only a quarter of young people.

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