

Promoting Innovative Cleantech Startups: The BMW Foundation, Robert Habeck, and Bill Gates at the Foundation Roundtable

High-ranking representatives from government, business, the foundation sector, and the Energy Resilience Leadership Group (ERLG) came together at the Foundation Roundtable to discuss how to promote and finance innovation.

Munich/Berlin, June 1, 2024 – Executives from more than 20 major foundations met in May in Berlin for the Foundation Roundtable to strengthen their commitment to the innovation ecosystem and to promote the startup sector. The Roundtable was initiated by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action, UnternehmerTUM, and the BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt. In cooperation with the Energy Resilience Leadership Group (ERLG), different roundtables discussed various key issues such as the role of innovations for the energy transition, promoting an innovative startup culture, and increasing society's resilience.

Dr. Robert Habeck and Bill Gates opened the discussion on the topic of “Startup Funding in the United States and in Germany – The Role of Foundations.” It became clear just how important it is to leverage public-private partnerships and pool financial resources to accelerate innovations – an approach that is already very much a lived reality in the United States.

Collaboration for Innovation and Scaling

Another thing that became clear at the Roundtable was that Germany does not lack innovative ideas or founders but falls behind when it comes to scaling and commercializing solutions and products.

There are many and varied reasons, from restrictive regulations (which often confuse rather than coordinate) to a lack of trust in the market or one's innovative power to a lack of funding. For example, nonprofit organizations (NGOs) are not allowed to directly finance startups; however, foundations can advise and connect innovative companies.

Other frequent obstacles are a “lone wolf mentality” and a lack of understanding and misalignments at the executive level that ultimately controls investment. There is currently no roadmap for innovation. In addition, nobody wants to take responsibility if the investment fails. Therefore, the BMW Foundation aims to build a “we mindset” to foster collaboration and strengthen society when it comes to the topic of innovation.

“We believe in innovation – not just in technological terms but also as a means to collaboratively shape the future and take the right decisions. An innovative economy promotes social resilience,” emphasized **Dr. Heba Aguib, Member of the Board of the BMW Foundation**. “To cope with global challenges and implement new solutions and approaches, it takes the collaboration between industry, government, science, and civil society. If we unite decision-makers and experts from these sectors, we all stand to gain from social change. This is also why we joined the ERLG, the Energy Resilience Leadership Group. This initiative truly understands this collaborative approach and is already implementing it: Together we want to

advise and support startups across Europe whose innovative solutions tackle the challenges of climate change.”

The Energy Resilience Leadership Group

The energy crisis caused by the war in Ukraine has highlighted Europe’s dependence on Russian natural gas. Against the backdrop of global climate change and concerns about Europe’s energy supply security, the ERLG was launched at the Munich Security Conference (MSC) in 2023.

Founding members include Breakthrough Energy, an organization founded by Bill Gates to support innovative solutions for a clean energy future, and Siemens Energy, a global leader in energy technology. Earlier this year, the ERLG expanded its strategic management team to include the BMW Foundation and UnternehmerTUM as new core partners. Its operational partners (Tech for Net Zero, Cleantech for Europe, and RISE Europe) support the regulatory initiatives and the matchmaking between startups and experts. In addition, the ERLG initiative comprises twelve member companies from fields such as the circular economy, heat transfer, energy storage, and decarbonization.

The collaboration between startups, experienced companies, and political and financial stakeholders aims to promote innovative climate technologies and reduce the dependence on natural gas. In the first year of its existence, the group was able to support eight big cleantech projects that successfully help reduce gas consumption in the industry, energy, and building sectors.

At the 2024 MSC, the ERLG called on the heads of state and government and the European Commission to develop a joint European Energy Resilience Strategy. According to the ERLG, such a strategy should be based on the following five pillars:

- Build a business case for the Green Deal and leverage the Single Market
- Secure Europe’s energy infrastructure
- Make Europe’s power grid more interconnected and fit for purpose
- Design and prioritize new market instruments
- Empower the European Investment Bank to fund cleantech projects.

Strategic Alignment and Networking

Dr. Heba Aguib, Member of the Board of the BMW Foundation, has joined the initiative’s management team as member of the Advisory Board. She joins current board members Ann Mettler from Breakthrough Energy, Christian Bruch from Siemens Energy, and Prof. Dr. Helmut Schöneberger from UnternehmerTUM.

As a core partner, the BMW Foundation will significantly contribute to setting the direction and developing the guidelines for the initiative. Besides this strategic function, the BMW Foundation also helps connect startups and CEOs at relevant companies, political organizations, and financial institutions. Here, the BMW Foundation draws on its long-standing expertise in building and growing its own Responsible Leaders Network. The Foundation has special experience in creating trustful spaces that enable an open and impactful dialogue on topics such as leadership, innovation, and pro-democracy solutions.

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About the BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt

The BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt unites economic innovators, political decision-makers, leading scientists, and civil-society representatives in a global network. Together with its partners, the Foundation advocates for innovations and sustainable changes across borders, cultures, and systems. It aims to pave the way for an innovative and responsible economy and to lay the foundation for a liveable future.

As a European foundation with a global perspective, the BMW Foundation operates out of offices in Berlin and Munich.

Find more information about the BMW Foundation Herbert Quandt at <https://bmw-foundation.org/>.