Special Edition
40 years of EFIL
1960-1970: EFIL before EFIL

“Once upon a time in Torino, Italy…” How did it all begin? During an informal meeting, volunteers talked about cooperation between AFS organisations in Europe for the very first time. This meeting paved the way for the formal launching of AFS Europa in 1971.

1971-1980: On the road to Intercultural Learning

AFS Europa became EFIL. EFIL put Intercultural Learning on the table, gave the youth of Europe a voice, and established connections with the European institutions.

1981-1990: A widening focus

EFIL’s tasks expanded - new European exchange programmes were launched, several colloquiums took place, establishment of the Africa desk. The cooperation with AFS International led to the opening of the Joint Office in Brussels (J.O.B.).


In the late 80’s and early 90’s EFIL faced a crisis, both internally and externally. A new development plan presented at the General Assembly in 1994 marked a turning point and a new beginning for the Federation.

2001-2011: Increased visibility and credibility

EFIL has been able to meet the many challenges it faced in the 90’s, and has regained its credibility with the European institutions, enhanced visibility among volunteers, achieved support from Member Organisations.
In 1964 AFS celebrated the 50th anniversary of the first ambulance services (1914) with a reunion in New York and lots of events around the world. The AFS chapter of Torino, Italy, had the idea of inviting three delegates from every AFS organisation in Europe to an informal meeting, with the purpose of sharing experiences and discussing how AFS could develop common activities in Europe. The idea was endorsed by the national board of AFS Italy and an invitation was sent out to all 15 AFS organisations then existing in Europe. 11 accepted the invitation and sent their delegates to Torino 1-4 November 1964 for an informal volunteer gathering. The meeting led to the establishment of a “European Information Committee” of volunteers that began to publish a European newsletter - the first one ever to spread the word about what AFS was doing in the different European countries.

A second informal European meeting followed in Istanbul in September 1965 and a third one in Oxford in 1966. In 1967 the volunteer meeting merged with a regional meeting called “European Conference”, and the event became an annual activity on the calendar. AFS International supported this voluntary cooperation movement in Europe and in 1967 it opened its first “European Coordination Office” in Brussels with three staff. It was the joint effort of this new office and of the European Information Committee that led to the establishment of a permanent European Federation in 1971.

Testimony from meeting in 1964:

It was the 4th of November 1964. It was the last day of an informal meeting of AFS volunteers, the first ever to talk about AFS cooperation in Europe.

“I think that we have started something great and powerful today and that 50 years from now someone may still remember this meeting! Maybe 30 years from now some AFS people will still have meetings like this, somewhere in Europe, and will remember this beginning...”

- Klaus Hinsch, AFS Germany, at the closing session of the volunteer gathering in Torino.

“...We all laughed. Well, 47 years later we are still here: we remember that event and we celebrate the formal establishment of EFIL 40 years ago.”

- Roberto Ruffino

AFSers from all over the world on the steps of San Gimignano Cathedral at a Summer Conference in 1968

1st informal meeting of European AFS representatives, Torino, Italy, November 1964

European Conference, Bellagio, Italy, 1970
At the AFS World Congress in Lake Mohonk in 1971, the by-laws of a European federation were approved and AFS Europa was created. Its first General Assembly took place a year later in Birgitz, Austria, when Fritz Otti was elected Chair of the EFIL board.

The birth of EFIL can be seen as the result of the crisis of old naïve idealism, of the loss of image of the USA, of the hope for a united Europe, and of a new trend towards internationalisation. The first immediate result was to open the AFS network to multilateral exchanges: In 1970-71 12 students from Europe went to Latin America. EFIL was the first step of an internationalisation process at AFS, which was long and painful and it came to some completion only in the 90’s with the establishment of a partnership system. For many years the old “American” AFS looked at EFIL with suspicion - as a “power block” - and EFIL’s first decade was full of battles and antagonism.

40 years later it’s correct to say that EFIL played a positive role in the evolution of AFS and introduced new programmes and new topics for the benefit of the whole network:
- the multinational exchanges
- the training of volunteers and staff, with three/four European seminars a year - which influenced also youth policies and EU programmes in general
- the ambition of being present in all cultural areas of the world - especially in Eastern Europe and in Africa
- the focus on educational content, beginning with a Colloquium on “Youth Mobility and Education” in 1978 at the Council of Europe

**Historical perspective:**

What was the world like when volunteers met in Torino in 1964? Common people did not travel in masses. Common people did not have friends in other countries. For Europeans, America was a promised land, an outpost of freedom, a place where one could “rub elbows with democracy” - as it was written in a letter by one AFS student in 1955. The philosophy of AFS was summarised in a slogan: Walk together, talk together... What it meant was that war is a consequence of isolation and ignorance and that peace is the result of knowledge and understanding.

This equation was too simplistic, it was wishful thinking, as people started realizing in the 60’s and 70’s when better communication, mass tourism and international business did not prevent any conflict from happening; in Vietnam, but also here in Europe. The late 60’s and the 70’s were years full of student unrest, atomic fears, local wars, decolonisation problems, ethnic fights. In the 60’s and 70’s youth became more and more disenchanted with a Western idea of democracy and with America’s role in the world and in AFS we realised that we could not promote peace by simply bringing people in and out of the United States. At the same time when the political climate around America was changing, Marshall McLuhan developed the concept of a global village and the United Nations launched the project of a World University. In Europe the “Communities” (the Union) were “enlarged” to three new countries and their mandate began to grow beyond agriculture and trade: in 1973 they opened a new division on education and research. A new wind of internationalisation was changing the face of politics, economy, education.
On the road to Intercultural Learning

1971 - 1980

The launching of AFS Europa in 1971...

The European Coordination Letter of 1971 explains the reasons for launching AFS Europa, when it states that “members felt that the creation of the federation was justified by the need for an increase of information among members, a pooling of financial resources, know-how and manpower, a stimulation and strengthening of volunteer involvement, a cooperative communication with AFS International, an effective voice in AFS issues, a less American and more international image of AFS, and the provision of organisational means on a European basis by which existing and future programmes can be implemented”. The article adds that “it is necessary to stress that the Federation is conceived as a tool to promote communication, cooperation and to further the purpose of AFS, not just for the benefit of Europe, but for the benefit of AFS at large” and that “it is not and does not want to be a power block, a nest of costly additional bureaucracy, a center of inward looking regionalism”. No country was excluded from the possibility of joining the federation, although it was felt preferable, if only for financial reasons, to offer membership to what was traditionally considered Europe. It became evident at Lake Mohonk (AFS World Congress ’71) that the concept of AFS Europa had been largely misinterpreted by countries outside of Europe, and that it was met with some distrust and suspicion.

AFS Europa establishes first contact with EEC and the Council of Europe

The former EEC established a department of education and youth, which was visited by AFS Europa’s Chair, Roberto Ruffino, in 1974, after which the organisation was invited to define the policy of the EEC on student’s mobility.

The Council of Europe established a Foundation that supports conferences of youth organisations in Europe. The European Youth Foundation in Strasbourg today still plays an important role in EFIL’s work and these contacts were the first steps towards obtaining formal recognition of AFS Europa and of its activities from the only super-national entities existing at the time. Other contacts included the European Coordination Bureau for International Youth Organisations, the Union of International Associations, the Centre d’Éducation Européenne.
AFS Europa is officially recognised - with a new name!

In 1974 AFS Europa approached the European institutions in Brussels and Strasbourg and soon realised that there was an identity problem. What was the "AFS" before "Europa"? What did the "A" stand for? The Federation was perceived as a branch of an American organisation - despite the effort to make the name less anglophone by naming it "Europa". AFS Europa needed a new, more European name that would reflect its identity and its mission in this part of the world. At the General Assembly in 1975 it was decided to change the name to something European that would reflect the purpose of the organisation, hence “European Federation for Intercultural Learning” - as the aim of the federation should be the promotion of intercultural learning.

As of 9 December 1975 a Royal Decree publicly recognised the existence of “the international association called European Federation for Intercultural Learning (AFS Europa), seated in Brussels”. EFIL was born.

When AFS Europa changed its name to EFIL, intercultural studies were very lively, especially in the United States, and the new name meant a big leap into an innovative field. On a small scale EFIL introduced new theories in Europe, especially within the European institutions, youth organisations and schools. EFIL applied for consultative status at the Council of Europe in 1976 and EFIL was admitted to the youth organisations of the Council of Europe. The Federation was also well received at the Commission. The first exchange of young workers was developed in 1977, and in 1979 EFIL helped set the guidelines for the programme that later was called “Leonardo”, and was also involved in the preparation of other youth mobility programmes, such as “Erasmus”, “Petra”, etc.

Quotes from Inge van Gaal - EFIL’s European Coordinator

“We tried to really make sure that this whole idea about Intercultural Learning was a vivid idea and we could make programmes around this idea.”

“The challenge was also to create new programmes; to get other ideas for programmes within the association”

“It was the first time the Institutions were giving the youth a voice - both through the establishment of the Youth Forum and by listening to us.”
Pilot of Young Workers Programme in cooperation with EC, 1977

In an attempt to respond to a call for diversity in AFS programmes, EFIL proposed an experiment in 1975: a programme of young workers exchanges. The European Community included the idea of such an exchange in the Treaty of Rome, and EFIL was given the responsibility to run a pilot of the project. Italy, France and Belgium joined and proposed that it would become an exchange of youngsters with technical education backgrounds. The programme was successfully launched in 1977 with 20 young people of around 18 years old. After one month of language training and orientation, they went to work in companies in various countries, hosted by families or staying in dorms, for a period of 3 months.

Aware of EFIL’s experience with youth exchanges, the EC asked EFIL to conduct a study on young workers exchanges in Europe, which led to a Convention, signed in 1979, allowing for EC subsidies. The Young Workers Programme was run from 1977 to 1985.

EFIL organised first important Colloquium at the European Youth Center in Strasbourg on “Youth Mobility and Education”, 1978

This was the first important educational event of EFIL. Together with the World Future Studies Federation, a colloquium was organised with the theme of “Youth Mobility and Education” at the Council of Europe’s Youth Centre in Strasbourg. In the words of EFIL’s preparatory committee: “It should be a brain-storming session to assess all the elements that are at stake, when youth exchanges are discussed and implemented. It should evaluate which research already exists, plan future research and clarify our possible impact on pedagogical studies. The ultimate best result of the Colloquium may be a list of the many things that we do not know in this area, which need further study and investigation”.

All the main European institutions (both governmental and non-governmental) dealing with youth and youth mobility were invited as participants along with the volunteers and staff from EFIL’s members. A group of experts in the fields of pedagogical science and culture were asked to contribute with their expertise.
A widening focus

1981 – 1990

Agreement of cooperation between AFS int. and EFIL

Still keeping their unique identity and purpose, AFS International Programs and the European Federation for Intercultural Learning decided to cooperate in 1985 by setting up a Joint Office in Brussels – “J.O.B.”. They were to manage AFS and EFIL activities and be a support center for the EURAFME region (Europe, Africa and the Mediterranean) and help the strengthening of existing programmes and the development of new ones.

“... Acknowledging that their activities are mutually beneficial, both AFS and EFIL agree to cooperate at all times with full information in support of the programmes and activities of the two organisations...” - Agreement of Cooperation, 1984

Philip Den Ouden filled the first position as Head of Joint Office, which meant being both Secretary General of EFIL and AFS Regional Vice President of the EURAFME region. The cooperation between AFS and EFIL via the Joint Office in Brussels was discontinued in 1989, after the new agreements on AFS Partnerships.

Africa Desk

As a result of the 1983 Colloquium on North-South Dialogue, a “North-South Committee” was established with the purpose to implement the initiatives made at the Colloquium of 1983, expand the number of partner countries in Africa, establish a funding strategy and develop alternative programme models.” This led to the establishment of the Africa Desk in May 1986, situated in Rome. This cooperation between EFIL and the Joint Office Brussels (J.O.B.) aimed to design programmes in developing regions that complemented professional training in education, journalism and restoration of African art. The goal was not just to educate individual participants, but achieve a “multiplier effect”, as teachers, journalists and other professionals are ideal transmitters of cultural knowledge and professional skills.

Focus on Intercultural Learning

At the Symposium on “Intolerance in Europe” of 1980 EFIL offered a definition of intercultural education that was widely used in the following years: “a new learning situation, where learners of different cultural backgrounds are helped to see their differences as resources to draw from and to gain a greater awareness of self, rather than as deviations from established norms; one where each culture is explained in the context of other cultures, through a process that stimulates doubts about self, curiosity for others and understanding of the interaction between the two. Such a process should involve the learners intellectually as well as emotionally”.

By the late 80’s “Intercultural” had become a popular term. Management courses, development projects, educational institutions, youth organisations, governments started to use it – often out of context or in situations where the issues at stake were social or economic rather than cultural.

EFIL itself ran the risk of wanting to do too many things for too many people and of losing sight of its specificity. New projects were tried out for students, young workers, migrants, East-West and North-South events. None of them was very successful in terms of numbers or continuity, and the end result was that the Federation diluted its identity in an attempt to be something for everyone.
1981: Colloquium on Intercultural Education in Strasbourg

The 1980s saw a series of important seminars by EFIL, often taking place at the Youth Centre in Strasbourg. The Colloquium on “Cultural Literacy and Intercultural Communication” in 1981 initiated the research focus of EFIL on the preparation for life in another culture. This was conducted both through the collection of material related to the orientations for young people who go abroad for educational purposes, and through a cycle of seminars on the same topic.

1983: Colloquium on North-South Dialogue in Ouagadougou: “Tombouctou ‘83”

57 educators from 31 countries in Africa and Europe and 9 international organisations met for a week in Ouagadougou to discuss whether youth exchanges could be organised between Africa and Europe on the premise of mutual respect, equal sharing and joint management. The Colloquium was the third and last in a series of seminars starting in 1982 with the theme of “The Cultural Dimension of the North-South Dialogue”. The intention of all three seminars was to provide a different approach to the North-South relationship by giving attention to a better understanding between African and European cultures.

1985: Colloquium on “Common values for human kind?” in Strasbourg

In an effort to raise the European profile of EFIL, a Colloquium was arranged with the theme “Common values for humankind?”. The question on the agenda was “…how to preserve the wide diversity of the world and to reinforce local cultural identities, while international organisations, trans-national business, the media and even the increasing mobility of people seem to lead to the opposite result. Some say that without a much greater degree of similarity among the different societies and cultures of the world, real peace and world harmony is not attainable. Does this mean that world peace and cultural diversity are in conflict with each other?” – The Colloquium ended with a statement against cultural relativism in favour of a shared vision of the future.

You shall not blow up the earth
You shall not pollute waters and skies
You shall not destroy forests, mountains and deserts
You shall not exploit your fellow human beings
You shall not forget your memories, but make them compatible with the memories of others.
EFIL saw many changes in the late 80’s and early 90’s in terms of staff and on the Board. The continuity and expertise suffered in a time where the Commission became more and more active in the area of educational exchanges. Externally EFIL suffered a loss of image and contacts and internally the purposes of the Federation became hazier and the ties among the Members became looser. At the General Assembly of 1993 in Madrid people raised the question whether EFIL should continue. A debate followed about the nature and the purpose of the Federation, also because in the meantime AFS had become a network of independent organisations with partnership agreements and several of the early priorities had become part of the international strategic plan.

To deal with the crisis, a meeting of National Directors produced a document for the General Assembly in 1994 – which marked a turning point and a new beginning for the Federation. Today’s “face” of EFIL is still the one that was drawn 17 years ago: a Federation of AFS organisation, with a biennial General Assembly, a Board with Directors elected for two years, a secretariat in Brussels, a close network of National Directors, and a priority on lobbying European institutions, sharing information among Members, training staff and volunteers.

By implementing the development plan of 1994, and with a focus on external representation and lobbying with the European Institutions in areas of youth mobility, education, voluntary service, global co-operation and vocational training, EFIL developed into a respected organisation by the end of the ’90s. Efforts were also invested in training and the development of intercultural materials, which further enhanced EFIL’s position and status to lobby.

**Challenges**

But EFIL had to face many more challenges.
- Europe had to deal with the end of the East/West division. AFS opened new partners in Russia, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Latvia, which became part of the EFIL family. EFIL had to regain a presence in the new countries that originated from the dissolution of Yugoslavia.
- The European Union accelerated the citizens’ integration process through large investments in youth mobility schemes - which threatened the role of private organisations, that so far had the monopoly of the field.
- The new partnership system in AFS caused severe turbulences in many partners, who were forced to invest on their internal stability in finances and governance rather than on European projects.
Increased visibility and credibility

Thanks to a stable secretariat, an active board and committed members, in the first decade of the new century EFIL has been able to meet the many challenges it was facing at the end of the ‘90s.

EFIL regained credibility with the European institution through research (‘The perception of pupils’ mobility in the European countries’ 2003, and the Individual Pupil Mobility Project 2006-2008, for which EFIL also ran a pilot project for the Commission after winning the open public tender).

Some partners in the west of Europe were lost (UK and Ireland) but several others were gained in the east and south-east (Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina) and the foundations are ready for the federation to grow even more.

EFIL helped the national offices to work more closely together through recurring meetings of the National Directors (HOO) and meetings of the heads of other departments in the national offices. Next to these meetings, an extensive annual training calendar has been put together and training opportunities were continuously offered to AFS volunteers and staff. EFIL developed an EPOT: “European Pool of Trainers.”

EFIL further enhanced its visibility in Europe with the Berlin International Educational Conference “Moving Beyond Mobility” of 2008 and the “Call for Action” and an official publication resulting from it.

Volunteers of Member Organisations were offered great opportunities of interacting with other areas of the world through large scale projects, like the EU- Japan project (2006), Worldoscope – Strength Through Diversity (2008), EurAfrican Partnership for Change (2010), all of them sponsored by the European Commission.

Volunteer Summer Summit

Inspired by volunteer gatherings in the ‘60s, the initial idea of having a Volunteer Summer Summit was to gather a large number of AFS volunteers from all over Europe to share and improve everyone’s practices in volunteer work and training. Along with this great learning experience came a huge motivational impact that catches all participants. Started as a pilot event in 2008 in Vigy (France) the event visited Istanbul (Turkey, 2009), Budapest (Hungary, 2010) and EFIL is planning 2011’s edition in Portugal.

Comenius Project – Individual Pupil Mobility Pilot

After winning the European tender for the preparation of the European Commission’s new Comenius programme, EFIL successfully coordinated the various project phases, meanwhile building up good relations and an excellent network with partners in the field, with National Agencies and schools and with the European Commission. As a result of this project, the Commission gained an overall view of the legislative situation regarding secondary school education and the exchange of minors in 31 different countries in Europe (phase 1), and recommendations on the practical implementation of the action, based on the evaluation of the pilot mobility phase (phase 2 & 3: design of framework + pilot exchanges).
In the last years of the decade, EFIL launched three major annual projects, currently referred to as its “flagship projects”:
- ECTP (European Citizenship Trimester Programme) and the end-of-stay camp in Brussels focuses on the concept of European citizenship education in addition to intercultural learning;
- Through the annual Volunteer Summer Summit a sense of European belonging amongst our volunteers was spread;
- Through the European Day of Intercultural Dialogue (on the last Thursday of September every year), EFIL increased its visibility in the field of intercultural learning on local level.

The presence of the European Institutions puts EFIL in a unique position, providing tremendous opportunities to strengthen AFS through fund-raising for several training events, seminars, meetings, study sessions, projects and programmes, aimed at volunteers and staff of the Member Organisations, this way strengthening the capacity of existing partners and the position of AFS as leader in intercultural learning, by increasing public recognition, credibility and visibility for AFS.

It should be mentioned that the fragility of the Federation remains an area of concern, as few member organisations are growing, and quite a number of the members currently face difficulties of some kind.

In the new century the intercultural arena is much more complex and articulate than 40 years ago and defining the territory and specificity of EFIL has become more difficult. Mobility for mobility’s sake is no longer enough. The pedagogical aim and content of exchanges receives more attention. Our main concern, as a European organisation, has always been to promote opportunities for cultural confrontations among students, families, schools and youth in general. At the same time we are a part of a larger group of responsible citizens who feel a sense of urgency in our societies in Europe, confronted with the realities of cultural and economical integration, mass migrations and minority rights. Indeed Europe needs a new brand of good citizens and our work may be a step in the right direction.

Intercultural Dialogue Day
Since 2008, on the last Thursday of September, EFIL and its member organisations across Europe hold their Intercultural Dialogue Day, or the celebration of culture itself that comes to the streets and reaches out to participants and unaware passers-by inviting them to the surrender to the spirit and join in the activities, reflections, festivities...Events are taking place in some 300 locations all over Europe, including school workshops, youth debates, panel discussion, concerts, movie screenings, street entertainment, competitions, markets, flashmobs, etc. and get a lot of media coverage celebrating and promoting intercultural dialogue and diversity.

ECTP
Since 2009, EFIL is organising the European Citizenship Trimester Programme, a trimester exchange programme within Europe, with an end-of-stay camp in Brussels focusing on the diversity within Europe and the promotion and development of active European citizenship. Participants attend workshops and share experiences, concentrating and reflecting on newly acquired intercultural competences, understanding of diversity. A day is reserved for a guided visit to the European Parliament. They learn about the developments in intercultural Europe, and get introduced to issues like multilingualism, EU enlargement and Europe’s diversity, which adds an additional platform of discussion and new points of view for the camp’s sessions and workshops.

ECTP participants at European Parliament, 2009
Chairs

Fritz Otti (AUT) Roberto Ruffino (ITA) Antonio Valadas (POR) Inge van Gaal, Karen E. Hapgood (UK) †, Maurizio Stecco (ITA), Hans Bohman (SWE) Eddy Fareilly (IRL), Lotte Fabrin (DEN), Elisabeth Carlsson (SWE), Ger Hatton (IRL), Harry Grielen (NED), Horst Harnischfeger (GER), Patrick Worms (BEL), Martin Petersen (DEN), Roberto Ruffino (ITA)

Secretary Generals:

Inge van Gaal (European Coordinator), Philip Den Ouden (Head of Joint Office Brussels as EFIL SG and AFS VP), Hillary Maher, Martha Mendez, Karin Wynen, Elisabeth Hardt, Christelle Maes, Paul Claes

GA locations: