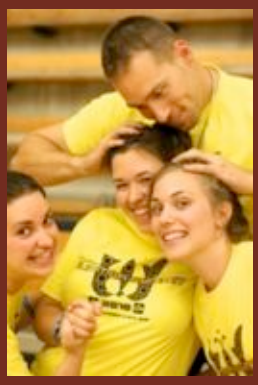
EFILife

Newsletter
Edition 86, December 2010

A Christmas message



It's hard to believe, but at the end of this month we're waving goodbye to the first decade of the century. Seems like yesterday when we celebrated the start of the new millennium. The past twelve months have passed by as if they were twelve days. It was a very good year. And an exciting one indeed. Thanks to our committed members, a determined board and a stable secretariat, EFIL has been able to meet the challenges of a very full activity calendar in 2010.

Major successes of the past year include the second edition of our European Citizenship Trimester Programme with the closing camp in Europe's capital city of Brussels, attended by more than 150 participants from across the continent. Exceeding the success of the two previous editions, more than 200 volunteers from 33 countries gathered in Zanka, Hungary, for the third edition of the EFIL Volunteer Summer Summit. And for the third year running, on the last Thursday of September, EFIL and the Member Organisations have reached out to the public on our European-wide Intercultural Dialogue Day, a celebration of culture and diversity in over 200 locations across Europe.

Another highlight of the year was the EurAfrican Partnership for Change project, involving volunteers from 14 countries, in support of our AFS Partners in Ghana, Kenya and South Africa, and closing with an international seminar in Austria.

Next to the above mentioned flagship projects, several highly appreciated EFIL trainings, seminars and meetings were organised, targeting AFS volunteers (study session on European Citizenship in France; Training for Trainers in Hungary; Governance Seminar in Sweden; ICL Seminar in France; Volunteer Training in Bosnia-Herzegovina; Regional Meeting for Board Chairs in Argentina) and staff of the national AFS offices (Heads of Office meetings in France and Argentina; Programme Directors meeting in Bosnia-Herzegovina). Substantial funding was raised by EFIL for the majority of the training activities, mainly through successful funding applications with the European institutions.

The EFIL network is expanding. We are very proud of our four new partner organisations in South Eastern Europe. We now have official representations of AFS in Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. We are looking forward to welcome them as new members of the Federation at our General Assembly next year in Vienna.

Meanwhile, EFIL is following up on developments in Europe, networking and lobbying on behalf of the Member Organisations, through several platforms, working groups and committees, participating in the political processes under way in Europe in the field of educational exchanges and citizenship building.

Last but not least, I would like to extend a sincere word of thanks to the numerous people that have supported EFIL over the past year, sparing no time or effort to keep things moving and help us improve our services: the staff and boards of the national offices and of AFS International, members of the EPOT and TAB, the wonderful AFS volunteers all over Europe who participated in our activities and helped us with the coordination of events as members of the prep teams, support teams or trainers teams, and of course first and foremost : my very own board and my dear colleagues at the EFIL secretariat in Brussels, without whom none of the above would have happened!

I wish you all the very best for an unforgettable 2011.

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SUCCESSFUL ECTP BRUSSELS CAMP

From Sunday 28 November until Thursday 2 December, 155 young students, age 15 to 18, coming from 16 European countries, gathered in Brussels for the EFIL closing camp of their trimester exchange under the **European Citizenship Trimester Programme**, before returning to their home countries. They came from Russia, Latvia, Italy, Croatia, Switzerland, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Portugal, Spain, Denmark, Germany, France, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Belgium Flanders and Belgium French. The participants had the unique opportunity to share their AFS experience with their peers from various other European countries, adding a substantial value to their trimester school exchange. In workshops and sessions they reflected on their stay abroad and also on issues like European citizenship and integration.

On Sunday the big invasion of the Camp near Brussels began, most of the participants were in desperate need of sandwiches and a spot close enough to the heating. The sudden winter in Brussels especially scared the South-European youngsters, but in the end it was clear that we all favoured snow over rain.

Monday was filled with interesting workshops that had been prepared by the trainers team: connecting experiences and discussions on European topics were put on the agenda. The evening programme was filled with the vibes of violins and the sound of 300 feet dancing Scottish folk dances (thank you, Ronan).

The next morning we all headed for the center of Europe's capital city Brussels for a guided visit to the European Parliament. As was to be expected, this proved to be one of the highlights of the week. At the Parliament, they were given a presentation and information on the European Union institutions, where they learned about the legislative and executive roles, members, presidency, meetings and working of the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers, and the European Commission. After they visited the impressive hemi-circular auditorium where the Parliament holds its Brussels sessions and committee meetings, lunch was organised in the European Parliament's visitors restaurant. The weather gods were not on our side, but the snow didn't stop them from continuing the day's programme with a rally through Brussels' city centre to see the royal Palace, the Grand Place and other major landmarks of Brussels.

On Wednesday self-chosen topics were presented by volunteers and participants in several sessions throughout the day. The facilities of the Training Centre proved to be ideal to create a great atmosphere in the group and a feeling of belonging. In the workshop „Citizenship 3.0", a Facebook group was created seeking

to colour up the grey and monotone world that sometimes surrounds us. (http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_157274127650489)

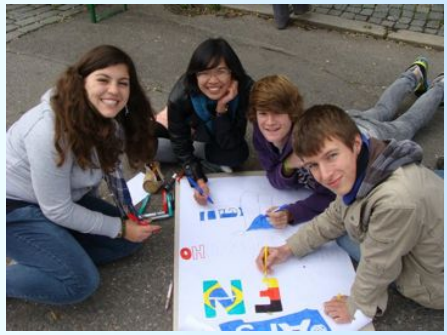
Nothing lasts forever, and finally on Thursday, tired but with big smiles on their faces (and tears in their eyes), the participants returned to their homes after three intense but unique days of sharing and learning about countries, cultures and lives.

With the extraordinary support of the volunteers of the prep team, the support team and the trainers, coming from EFIL's Member Organisations in all corners of Europe, EFIL's second edition of the ECTP Camp was a tremendous success. More about the activities can be reviewed on the ECTP camp website: www.ectp2010.eu which contains a blog with many pictures. We're already looking forward to next year's edition.

FAIRYTALE FORESTS AND INTERCULTURAL CARPETS FOR INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE DAY 2010 IN CZECH REPUBLIC

As in several other countries 2010's Intercultural Dialogue Day has been a great success in Czech Republic. Volunteers and AFS students set up six events spreading creativity and the AFS spirit among the Czech people.

In Bílovice the local chapter's volunteers prepared a number of stands with intercultural games and quizzes and promotional materials such as leaflets, balloons and badges. In addition there was a game for children – the forest of fairy tales, which attracted a big audience of families and potential future exchange students.



Also in Písek events were developed to tell people about AFS and intercultural learning. Different activities were offered and people of all age groups had a great day. All this was possible thanks to the tireless efforts of 15 local AFS volunteers.

Creating an intercultural carpet – this was the idea the people from the AFS chapter in Sever had in mind for IDD 2010. Everyone was invited to take part by taking a piece of cloth, writing their intercultural experiences on it and then stitching it to the "carpet". This way a diverse collection of experiences was created in a inventive and creative way which shall now be exposed in public spaces.

A very specific, yet highly interesting, event took place in Jičín. The chapter of Východ has a vast experience in hosting Asian students. Therefore, several host mothers decided to prepare a debate on this topic aiming to inform the audience about cultural differences between the Czech and the Asian culture. This discussion gathered a lot of interest from the public, and could well lead to the recruitment of some additional host families!

For the third year running, AFS Czech Republic has been actively involved in our Intercultural Dialogue Day. They can be justifiably proud of the events that took place all organised by a group of creative and strongly committed volunteers. Congratulations to the volunteers!

PREPARATIONS FOR THE VOLUNTEER SUMMER SUMMIT 2011

The preparatory team of the 4th EFIL Summer Summit has already started its work. You will soon read about it in the traditional VSS Herald, the first issue will come out next week. The team is looking forward to its first meeting in Portugal in January, where they will visit the actual venue. There are plans for some innovations in the upcoming VSS to further improve the quality and the learning process for the benefit of all the participants.

The venue

The VSS 2011 will take place from 20 to 25 July 2011 in the Eco Camp Resort & Spa "ZMAR", a name that speaks for itself. The unique resort offers a superb surrounding landscape, ecological awareness, and a wide range of modern facilities for activities, relaxing times and fun. A water park, TV lounge, an events tent, playground, restaurant, supermarket, spa, gym - these are only a few of the many facilities provided by ZMAR. The team is working hard to put together a programme that makes it difficult for you to choose between interesting workshops and all kinds of VSS activities! ☺

ZMAR is not only a venue that meets the requirements of the Summit, but it is also the 1st Eco Camping Resort in Portugal. ZMAR's facilities perfectly blend in with the natural surroundings. The place uses renewable resources such as wood and stone. All accommodation has thermal solar panels installed to heat the water. Exterior furniture and signs are made of recycled plastic. Buildings are constructed in order to take advantage from the natural shade, and all windows are installed in a way to let the air circulate thus reducing the need for air conditioning. ZMAR provides a wide-range of healthy food, most of it provided by local farmers.

The Calendar of the VSS 2011

January	1st Prep Team meeting in Portugal
February	New Webpage and Facebook group Call for participants
March	Early application deadline Call for trainers
April	Deposit payment (early application) 2nd Call for participants
May	Final payment (early application), Deposit payment (late application), Final application deadline
June	Final payment deadline Registration for workshops and rooms Participants provide travel details
July, 20-25th	The VSS 2011

More precise deadlines will be provided later in EFILife, in the VSS Herald and on the Webpage. Remember to look out for the VSS Herald, which will come out once a month from on.

CALL FOR VSS LOGO

Tulips, globes, butterflies – these and many more items have been included in the logos and associated in our minds with EFIL's annual Volunteer Summer Summit. They bring back the wonderful memories of time spent with volunteers from across the continent in France (2008), Turkey (2009) and Hungary (2010). As the preparatory team has already started its work, we are starting our search for the VSS 2011 logo. It will appear on the t-shirts, letterhead, communication materials such as the VSS Herald and the webpage!

After the great success of the logo competition for the European Citizenship Trimester Programme (ECTP) and the EurAfrican Partnership for Change project, it is important that we yet again find a cool and appropriate logo for the largest volunteer event in the AFS network, so we call on the creative minds in the network to propose a design for the logo for the VSS in Portugal! So join this competition and leave your mark on the VSS 2011! Eternal fame will be yours.

As for content and layout, your imagination sets the limit! We do however have a few requirements:
the VSS Sun must be included;
the logo must link up with the host (Portugal) or the theme ("Promoting Multiculturalism through Volunteer Work").

Specifications: The logo should be sent in a .jpg or .gif format, in good resolution and colour, or as a scanned hand-made drawing, so that we can apply the necessary software to make it computer friendly!

Deadline: The submissions will be discussed at the meeting of the preparatory team in Portugal in January. So go wild and send your creations to charlotte.klinting@afs.org no later than 10 January 2011!

PARTNER NEWS

IN EACH EDITION OF EFILIFE, WE DEDICATE SOME SPACE TO PARTNER NEWS, INCLUDING PERSONNEL CHANGES AS WELL AS RELEVANT EVENTS THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE OVER THE PAST MONTH.

Our partner organisation **AFS Italy** has announced the appointment of Matilde Piva as the new Support Coordinator for Intercultura. Matilde is an AFS returnee herself and a graduate in Foreign Languages and Literatures at Ca' Foscari University in Venice

AFS Switzerland held its annual volunteer training. Over 70 people (volunteers, staff and board members) gathered for 3 days at the youth hostel in Solothurn.

There was a wide offering of parallel trainings, workshops and hands-on working groups in German and French. Following the motto "Parlez d' AFS" or "Spreading the word about AFS", the group claimed the streets of Solothurn on Saturday afternoon wearing AFS shirts and interacting with the locals.

From **AFS Egypt** comes the news that 200 dedicated voluntee rs from all 15 chapters, staff and me mbers of the board met for three days, 2-4 December, in Wadi El Na-

troon for the “Moltaqa”, AFS Egypt National Volunteer Training 2010. Special guests were the visitors from South Africa, Kenya and Ghana who were in Cairo for the first Africa Regional meeting.

The annual national training provides the time and space for volunteers to get to know each other, to network and to get new energy and motivation for their volunteer work with AFS Egypt. The three days were packed with workshops, team building activities and chapter sessions. It was a time well spent by the participants for sharing information, experiences, lots of smiles and good memories.

And to end this month’s overview of Partner news, here’s some news about the AFS International Diversity Scholarship Grants for 2011-2012. The Selection Committee has shared the list of winners with the network. We’re happy to note that there are several EFIL partner organisations among the beneficiaries.

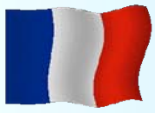
AFS Serbia will send one participant to M exico on a year programme scholarship. This participant will be the first from Serbia to go to Latin America. AFS Serbia and AFS Mexico will jointly select the student from their submitted essays. It will be promoted as a contest, and the winner will receive a full scholarship. The contest will be promoted with the support of high schools, local youth offices, and Radio Television Serbia. In conjunction with this contest, AFS Serbia will ask ProCredit Bank for financial support by offering a full scholarship for the first African student (from Ghana) to be hosted in Serbia. At the same time, Serbia will host one student from Internado Infantil Guadalupano in Mexico on a sponsored year programme. Inter-

nado Infantil Guadalupano is an organization that provides comprehensive education to young men between the ages of 7 and 17, its main scope being to reintegrate these boys into society.

AFS Latvia received scholarships to send two students to Serbia and Thailand on year programmes, and two volunteers/teachers to Thailand on a 2-week programme. In addition to supporting the growth of Serbia's hosting programme, this diversity programme will allow the participants from Latvia to be hosted in Thailand for the first time. With these diversity programmes, AFS Latvia will be working with the Ministry of Education & Science and looks forward to continuing to strengthen that cooperation and to broaden their programmes.

AFS Switzerland will send two to four "GAP-year" participants on a

year programme scholarship, with the support of regional canton governments. "GAP-year" teenagers are those who have finished their 9th grade of compulsory school, but are neither enrolled in a classical high school nor accepted into an apprenticeship training program, and so are not regularly in touch with any kind of exchange program.



And last but not least, **AFS France** is to send two lower income high school students from Burgundy to either Chile or Mexico on a sponsored year programme. With the support of the Burgundian regional government and La Grand Chalon, an urban community within Burgundy, the participants will either be hosted in Chile, whose region of Maulé has a special partner agreement with Burgundy, or Mexico as 2011 will be the "Year of Mexico and France."

HAPPY 2ND BIRTHDAY INTERKULTURA SERBIA

From AFS in Serbia comes the happy news that INTERKULTURA celebrated its second anniversary in November.

Serbia has been working hard on becoming part of the AFS network for several years now, and even though Serbia already sent its first two students in 2007, the organisation wasn't officially registered until 2008, hence their second birthday.

The party took place on 13 November and was attended by returnees, host families, exchange students, old and new volunteers. Everyone enjoyed themselves greatly. For this special occasion, the volunteers made a presentation of all the events and activities Interkultura took part in. You can see it at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IsYlG-3_ec. For the photos of the party, we invite you to visit http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/album.php?aid=45343&id=100000186403465.

Congratulations to Ivana and all the volunteers of AFS in Serbia for their second anniversary and for their remarkable achievements over the past years. We wish Interkultura a bright future in the AFS network.

EVA PROGRAMME IN SLOVAKIA

BY ZOHRA LOVISKOVA, VOLUNTEER OF INTERKULTURA SLOVAKIA.

AFS Czech Republic has recently initiated the Czecho-Slovak project which already has had a strong impact on the mutual relationship between AFS in the Czech Republic and Interkultura Slovakia, the newly born partner organisation in Slovakia. The project has strenghtened the ties between the two organisastions, and our contacts now seem warmer and more lively than at any time in the past.

Volunteers in Slovakia have been eager to contact their counterparts in other countries where AFS has an active representation, and of course first and foremost especially those ones we have a special bond with: the volunteers in neighbouring Czech Republic. There's no language barrier, we share a common history and have common Czecho-Slovak family roots, and there's a lot of similarities in our lifestyles and values.

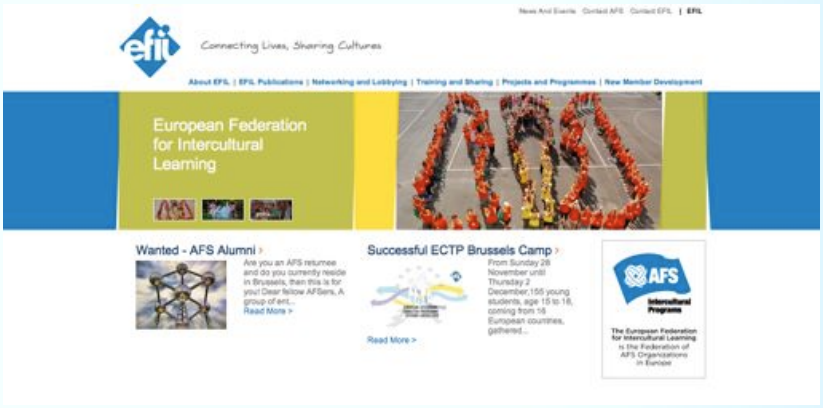
It is a great idea to start the revival of AFS activities in Slovakia together with our Czech friends. Having in mind the long time experience with the EVA programme, hosting mothers in Slovakia gladly accepted the offer of Czech hosting mothers to meet and share ideas and experiences about hosting as well as other aspects of life in AFS. The EVA programme acknowledges the important role hosting mothers play in AFS programmes, as it is mainly through their tireless efforts that a new home is created for their hosting daughter or son to help them get over the sometimes tough moments while living in their new family abroad.

While together we realised the importance of respect and tolerance, and of being broad minded. We came across a lot of topics to discuss and to enrich our AFS experience, our very own family lives and our personalities, and all of this in an athmosphere of fun, excitement and friendliness.

Our guests were wonderful companions and we spent unforgottable moments together from 14th -17th October in Nitra, one of the oldest towns in Slovakia, and a place rich with AFS history. We managed to visit Masaryk' s summer residence, we had a chance to feel the spirit of Slovak theatre, we spend some relaxing time in the thermal waters of a well-known Slovak spa and we enjoyed the quality of Slovak cuisine and young autumn wines.

AFS has returned to Slovakia and we are eager to let it grow!

EFIL LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE



EFIL has launched its newly designed website in mid-December. You can easily access all information about EFIL's projects and trainings, get in touch with us and find interesting publications. It will also keep you up-to-date showing the latest news and a detailed calendar. If you would like to feedback on the new website please write to thomas.juergenschellert@afs.org - You can access it via the old URL: www.efil.afs.org

WANTED : AFS ALUMNI

Are you an AFS returnee and do you currently reside in Brussels, then this is for you!

Dear fellow AFSers,

A group of enthusiastic AFS Alumni in Brussels with positions at the European Commission, the Council of the European Union and other European institutions, is trying to revive the network of AFS people with international activities in Brussels (AFS EuroNet). In a first phase the group is focusing on compiling a list with as many names as possible. EFIL is supporting this initiative and acts as the AFS EuroNet secretariat.
The aim is not only to meet up from time to time for a couple of drinks and some fun, but also to bring our minds and efforts together to further promote AFS in Europe.

We are planning a launching event for the coming year with more details about the projects that the AFS EuroNet group could develop. One idea would be to support EFIL in its efforts to help AFS expand into EU countries where there's currently no AFS presence, with focus on Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and Greece.

Can you help us spread the word?

Maybe you know of other AFS Alumni in the area, working both inside or around the European institutions in Brussels, who would be interested in joining AFS EuroNet?

Please send their names and e-mail addresses to Charlotte at the EFIL office (charlotte.klinting@afs.org), so that we can add them to the growing list of people.

Let's WALK TOGETHER, TALK TOGETHER.

"VOLUNTEER! MAKE A DIFFERENCE" – LAUNCHING THE EYV 2011

The European Commission had its official media launch of the European Year of Volunteering 2011 on 2 December. The ceremony was held in Brussels and it involved several key figures: the EC Vice-President and Commissioner for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship Viviane Reding, the MEP working on a groundbreaking report on Volunteering Marian Harkin and Jean-Marc Delizee – Belgium's federal Secretary of State for Social Affairs.
The event gave a green light also to the EYV Tour which is part of the activities planned from the EC to celebrate next year and of which EFIL has already reported in earlier editions of EFILife. A mobile tent will be moving around Europe throughout 2011 and will stop in each of the 27 Member States to give space to volunteers and their organisations to showcase their work, talk, meet others and inspire them to make a difference! To check when the EYV Tour is coming to your country, please see http://europa.eu/volunteering/en/tour . Brussels was the first stop of the Tent between 3 and 10 December. The Tent stood at Place d'Espagne and welcomed many visitors and volunteers to share stories in the Marketplace, discuss and learn more in the Debate room and have fun in the Entertainment section. Each Tent offers 3 thematic spaces to capture as many needs and moments as possible. More pictures and reports from the Brussels Tour could be found here: http://europa.eu/volunteering/en/content/brussels Next stop will be Budapest, Hungary!
In parallel, on 3 December – the International Volunteer Day, the year-long campaign aimed at better understanding and promoting volunteerism, too, has been officially kicked-off, better known as the UN International Year of Volunteering IYV + 10. Another tribute to volunteers around the world, their achievement and dedication but with a more global orientation.
It has been estimated by the John Hopkins Center for Civil Society that annually, the volunteer sector contributes some US $ 400 billion to the global economy. Nowadays, no major peace initiative, development and humanitarian aid can happen without the involvement and support of a well-protected volunteer force. Regretfully, this huge impact as well as the various paths volunteerism can take, are oftentimes staying out of sight for the wider society and governments in general.
Similar to the European Year 2011 and its aims, in marking IYV + 10, volunteer-based organisations will not only aim at promoting and recognizing the diversity of volunteerism initiatives worldwide, but will also call on governments, UN bodies and civil society actors to create and facilitate an enabling environment to support volunteerism. Different celebrations will take place around the world, one of the highlights being the Global Volunteering Summit in Kenya in June 2011.

A lot has been launched during the past week, putting all eyes on all of you – volunteers of AFS! Stay tuned for the EFIL updates on the many events and have a great start of the volunteer year 2011!

VOICE OF LONG-TERM EXCHANGES IN THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM

The General Assembly of the European Youth Forum (YFJ) which took place in November in Kyiv, Ukraine, marked the closing of the mandate in the YFJ Board of the EFIL representative, Michal Kadera from AFS Czech Republic. He deserved gratitude of all the AFS network for the work as the EFIL external representative in the past years.

At the same time, the GA elected the new Board for the upcoming 2-year period. EFIL is happy to announce that the future YFJ leadership will again enjoy a strong voice advocating the agenda of the exchange organisations, this time in the person of Katrine Korsgaard from YFU Denmark.

The European Youth Forum is a platform made up of 100 international youth NGOs and National Youth Councils from across Europe. The YFJ works to empower young people and youth organisations to participate actively in society and in decision making, by representing their interests towards the European Institutions, the Council of Europe, the United Nations and other organisations and partners active in the youth field. In practical terms, it is the only youth platform in Europe which is officially recognised and listened to by all relevant institutional partners. It voices concerns of its Member Organisations, striving to include their interests in political agendas.

The European Youth Forum is EFIL's strongest ally in our lobbying efforts and we have benefitted from their support numerous times in the past. The Forum is also an important field of EFIL's cooperation with other organisations active in the field of student exchanges. Through our common work at European level, we have ensured the presence of the long-term exchanges issues in the YFJ work in the past years.

EFIL NETWORKING IN EUROPE

Non-formal education: Quality Assurance for better recognition

The YFJ pilot project of which EFIL has been part since September 2009, has been closed in November 2010, with a long to-do list still remaining.

The 6 Member Organisations – Lithuanian Youth Council (LIJOT), European Students' Forum (AEGEE), World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS), the Flemish Youth Council (VJR), Youth for Exchange and Understanding (YEU) and EFIL have been testing a new scheme to ensure quality is kept and measured in youth NFE activities. Unique in this approach is the concept of giving peer feedback to evaluate projects of other youth organisations and mutually learn from each other.

Because of its specific nature, EFIL chose the ECTP Brussels Camp (see article on the first pages of this edition of EFILife) to be tested, and we got some helpful and expert recommendations. We had an opportunity to critically look into this innovative undertaking and together with the project team we learned a lot about the quality indicators and main milestones of a NFE activity. ECTP 2010 has grown considerably compared to last year's pilot – in both quality and quantity – of which we are very proud! Moreover, the experience on the spot from year to year has shown that quality is a learning and evaluation process. The two EFIL representatives in this project – Ilyana Panteleeva and Viviana Galli – are now better equipped to give peer feedback to projects and to support organisations in

their efforts to provide good quality activities for their volunteers and participants.
The next step is to revise the existing YFJ Policy Paper on Recognition of NFE based on the pilot project findings and to start with a series of capacity building events for YFJ member organisations. It starts from the assumption that if youth organisations are able to show they are applying mechanisms which ensure the good quality of their activities, then this will be an added value for their recognition. In January 2011, there will be a stakeholder conference coorganised by the YFJ which will aim to shed more light on the project outcomes and present the peer feedback approach as a valid tool to ensure quality of NFE activities and to find synergies and create trust with our external partners. In the long-term, the NFE-QA is aiming to be one of the founders and front runners of a Europe-wide QA network of individuals in evaluating NFE projects. EFIL is very excited to be part of this initiative and is looking forward to engage in an AFS wide dialogue on QA of youth exchanges, orientation framework events and NFE activities in 2011!

LEARNING ABOUT EUROPE

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT – VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

IN THIS MONTHLY COLUMN WE WILL FOCUS ON EVERYTHING YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT EUROPE, RANGING FROM EUROPE'S MISSION, HISTORIC MOMENTS, ENLARGEMENT AND NEIGHBOURING POLICY, TO THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES, THE EURO, THE FUTURE, ETC.

Key facts	
Role	Directly elected legislative arm of the EU
Most recent election	June 2009
President	Jerzy Buzek (Poland)
Meetings	Monthly plenary sessions in Strasbourg, additional plenary sessions and committee meetings in Brussels, secretariat in Luxembourg
Internet	europarl.europa.eu

Since 1979 the members of the European Parliament (EP) have been directly elected by the citizens of the European Union to represent their interests. Its origins go back to the 1950s and the founding Treaties. Elections are held every five years, and every EU citizen is entitled to vote, and to stand as a candidate, wherever they live in the EU. Parliament thus expresses the democratic will of the Union's nearly 500 million citizens and it represents their interests in discussions with the other EU institutions.

The latest elections were in June 2009. Parliament has 785 members from all 27 EU countries. Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) do not sit in national blocks, but in EU-wide political groups. Between them, they represent all views on political issues and European integration, from the strongly pro-federalist to the openly Eurosceptic.

Where is Parliament based?

The European Parliament has three places of work: Brussels (Belgium), Luxembourg and Strasbourg (France). Luxembourg is home to the administrative offices (the General Secretariat). Meetings of the whole Parliament, known as 'plenary sessions', take place in Strasbourg and sometimes in Brussels. Committee meetings are also held in Brussels.

What does Parliament do?

Parliament has three main roles.

1. Passing European laws – jointly with the Council in many policy areas. The fact that the EP is directly elected by the citizens of the EU helps guarantee the democratic legitimacy of European law.
2. Parliament exercises democratic supervision over the other EU institutions, and in particular the Commission. It has the power to approve or reject the nomination of commissioners, and it has the right to require the Commission as a whole to step down.
3. The power of the purse. Parliament shares with the Council authority over the EU budget and can therefore influence EU spending. It adopts or rejects the budget in its entirety.

Jerzy Buzek, current President of the European Parliament

How is the Parliament's work organised?

Parliament's work is divided into two main stages:

→ Preparing for the plenary session. MEPs debate the Commission's proposals in committees that specialise in particular areas of EU activity and on the basis of a report prepared by one of the committee members, the so-called 'rapporteur'. The report gives the background and the pros and cons of the proposal. The issues for debate are also discussed by the political groups.

→ The plenary session. Each year, 12 four-day plenary sessions are held in Strasbourg and 6 two-day sessions are held in Brussels. At these sessions, Parliament examines proposed legislation and votes on amendments before deciding on the text as a whole.

Other agenda items may include Commission 'communications' setting out its intentions in a particular sphere, or questions to the Commission or Council about what is going on in the EU or in the wider world.

POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN EUROPE

THIS COMPILATION IS BASED ON INFORMATION COLLECTED BY EFIL FROM THE DAILY NEWSLETTER "EUROPOLITICS – THE EUROPEAN AFFAIRS DAILY" AND FROM THE EUROPEAN YOUTH FORUM'S "YOUTH POLICY WATCH", A BI-WEEKLY BULLETIN. YOU CAN SUBSCRIBE TO THE YOUTH POLICY WATCH DIRECTLY FROM THE YOUTH FORUM WEBSITE: HTTP://WWW.YOUTHFORUM.ORG AND PRESS@YOUTHFORUM.ORG

EU Enlargement

For the first time since the start of the **EU-Turkey** accession talks, six full months will pass without the opening of a single chapter for negotiation. The EU-Turkey meeting, on 22 December, which was supposed to launch talks on competition policy, is now in jeopardy. This is the only one of three most advanced areas likely to be opened for talks in the near future. The other two areas are public procurement and social policy and employment. In its November progress report, the European Commission identified good progress on some of required benchmarks including the functioning of the recently established state aid authority. The document noted, however, that little progress has been achieved on state aid to the steel sector and in establishing institutions or a legal framework to regulate state aid in the transport or energy sectors.

The Dutch parliament has removed the last obstacle to **Montenegro**'s candidacy for EU membership, to be granted at the forthcoming European Council, on 16-17 December. During a debate, on 8 December, the Dutch MPs gave the green light to The Hague to grant Podgorica candidate status, without, however, specifying any date for opening accession talks. The Netherlands was the only member state to have had reservations and has been especially strict on such issues as organised crime, corruption and social liberties, requesting a proven track record in reforms in these fields before approving any steps forward in the EU integration process. EU diplomats admit that in the current context of the economic crisis the member states have little appetite for further enlargement, which would open their borders to a potential influx of cheap labour and goods.

VISA Regulations

France has reiterated its opposition to an immediate entry of **Romania** and **Bulgaria** into the Schengen area without border controls. Adressing the French parliament, European Affairs Minister Laurent Wauquiez was particularly passionate on the issue of Romania: "Romania does not recognise its borders with Moldavia concerning immigration flows". More generally, Wauquiez criticised the absence of border controls in the two applicant countries, citing corruption problems. Paris wants to delay the EU's decision on Romania and Bulgaria's entry into Schengen until summer 2011, and not to take the decision in March, as both countries would prefer.

In order to guarantee free movement within the **Schengen** area, the European Commission adopted, on 10 November, a proposal aimed at strengthening the mechanism for evaluating the correct application of the Schengen rules in the member states. Set up at the beginning of the 1990s, the Schengen area currently allows people to move within 25 member states plus Norway, Iceland and Switzer-

land without border controls. For the Commission, however, obstacles to this free movement remain, in particular affecting fluid traffic flow at road crossing-points at internal borders. Therefore, in order for the system to work, efficient application of all Schengen provisions and a high degree of mutual trust among the actors are essential. Only if the Schengen rules and regulations are applied effectively, consistently and in a transparent manner by the member states can European citizens fully benefit from the free movement.

Youth

The city of Maribor (Slovenia) has been crowned European Youth Capital for 2013. Amongst the four cities shortlisted, Maribor especially caught the jury's attention for its cooperation with stakeholders from the local to the European level, as well as a very diverse programme that included a variety of activities addressing challenges faced by young people all over Europe. The European Youth Capital initiative encourages the implementation of new ideas and innovative projects with regards to the active participation of young people in society, and seeks to present a role model for the further development of other European municipalities.

Education

In its meeting that took place in 19th November, the Education, Youth, Culture and Sports Council adopted a resolution to recognise the crucial work undertaken by youth workers. The meeting, which was chaired by the Flemish Minister for Education, Youth, Equal Opportunities and Brussels Affairs, Pascal Smet, more specifically discussed the vital role of non formal education within youth work today. Furthermore, the resolution invites the commission to carry out a study to map the diversity, coverage and impact of youth work in the EU.

EFIL CALENDAR

31 Jan.-5 Feb. 2011	Volunteer Coordinators (ODC) meeting, Hamburg, Germany
6-7 February 2011	Training Advisory Body (TAB), Hamburg, Germany
13-20 February 2011	Study Session on family support, Strasbourg, France
18-20 February 2011	EFIL Board meeting, Milan, Italy
March 2011	Programme Directors meeting, Maribor, Slovenia
20-26 March 2011	Fundraising Seminar, Brussels, Belgium

1-2 June 2011	EFIL Heads of Office (HOO) meeting, Vienna, Austria
2-5 June 2011	EFIL General Assembly, Vienna, Austria
5-6 June 2011	EFIL Board meeting, Vienna, Austria
15-21 July 2011	Training for Trainers, Odemira, Portugal
20-25 July 2011	Volunteer Summer Summit, Odemira, Portugal
29 September 2011	Intercultural Dialogue Day 2011
27 Nov – 1 Dec	European Citizenship Trimester Programme Brussels Camp, Belgium

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