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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

World Youth Alliance Europe's public hearing on "Solidarity, Freedom, Democracy... The experience of the World Youth Day and its contribution to the European project" at the European Parliament: MEPs and EU representatives count on youth!

In conjunction with the European Union Year of Volunteering and the International Year of Youth in 2011, World Youth Alliance (WYA) held on June 28th a public hearing at the European Parliament, hosted by Mr Jaime Mayor Oreja MEP, Vice-President of the EPP group, on "Solidarity, Freedom, Democracy... The experience of the World Youth Day and its contribution to the European project." Present MEPs and EU representatives, including the Hungarian and upcoming Polish Presidency of the EU, encouraged young people to take a role in the European project, and to participate in the positive changes that happen through volunteerism, active citizenship and cultural exchanges.

Africa

Asia Pacific

Europe

Latin America

North America

A life-changing experience for millions of young people, at the service of Europe

After the screening of a short film entitled "[26 years of World Youth Day](#)", EU representatives heard the **testimonies of two young persons, working now inside and outside of the European Parliament**, about the impact of this experience in their life and career. Participants at the hearing could hear that *"Coming from a family with a great social and even political engagement and in the same time living in the mediatized world, the message of trust and confidence [John Paul II] had for us, young people, was almost unheard. It seems to me that he, and Benedict XVI with him, encouraged us young people that we can make a difference, that the future is up to us". "Since then, I have gone to WYD not for myself but to able to give this message of hope."*

Yet, since the first World Youth Day gathering were launched on the occasion of the United Nations International year of Youth in 1985, millions of Europeans have participated in the event and taken this experience back home. It is by far **the largest youth gathering in world history and the largest youth grassroots individual and collective experience for the past 30 years**. In this regard, this specific example can point to **religion's unique contribution to building European citizenship**.

Youth has a role to take to shape the European Union of tomorrow

In response to these testimonies, MEPs and representatives of the EU Presidencies were unanimous in highlighting that **"If we invest in young people we can get out of the crisis"** (Vice-President of the European Parliament Gianni Pittella). Vice-President of the EPP group Jaime Mayor Oreja advocated **"World Youth Day is an event of freedom. [...] Second, this event reaffirms a commitment to society."** While MEP Alojz Peterle insisted that: **"We count on you... and you can count on us"**, MEP Lázló Surján emphasized that "It is up to the youth to change things".

On behalf of the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community, General Secretary of the COMECE Fr. Piotr Mazurkiewicz highlighted the interesting difference of perception of religion's role in the public sphere, recalling that in Eastern Europe religion is still connected with the idea of freedom, as John Paul



It's first pilgrimage in Poland contributed to bring people in solidarity again while the communist regime had caused the atomization of society.

In conclusion, after Representative of the Hungarian Presidency of the EU Balázs Márton recalled that non formal learning, volunteerism and active citizenship were yet at the core of the priorities of the trio, a Representative of the upcoming Polish Presidency encouraged youth to take part of Polish theme of "Youth in the world."

Speakers at this hearing were:

- Mr Jaime Mayor Oreja MEP, Vice-President of the EPP group
- Mr Gianni Pittella MEP, Vice-President of the European Parliament
- Mrs. Doris Pack MEP, Chair of the EP Committee on Culture and Education
- Mr. Alojz Peterle MEP, Member of the European Parliament
- Mr. László Surján MEP, Member of the European Parliament
- Fr. Piotr Mazurkiewicz, General Secretary of the COMECE
- Mr. Balázs Márton, Chair of Council Working Group for Youth, on behalf of the Hungarian Presidency of the EU
- Ms. Joanna Doberszyc-Toulsaly, First Secretary and Head of the Research, Education and Culture Section Permanent Representation of Poland to the EU

World Youth Alliance at World Youth Day 2011: Young people SHARE SOLIDARITY

As the World Youth Alliance gathers young men and women from every cultural and religious backgrounds, the NGO is going to be present at World Youth Day **from 16th to 21th of August this year in Madrid**, with the aim of reaching out to the active and involved youth present at this global event.

WYA invites all interested young people to join its "Solidarity Excursions" at World Youth Day, which is an opportunity to join young members from around the world to promote human dignity and the family, and share in solidarity with one another. WYA solidarity excursions will leave daily from WYA booth sites in Madrid, led by **a team of over thirty WYA staff and members**. More information on how to join is available at wyaatwyd.com.

For more information on this public hearing or on the World Youth Alliance and our advocacy at the European Parliament, please contact WYA Europe Director, Marie-Caroline Leroux at mariecaroline@wya.net.

***The World Youth Alliance** is a global coalition of around 1 million young people from all cultural and religious backgrounds dedicated to promoting the dignity of the person and building solidarity among youth from developed and developing nations. With about one million members from over 170 countries, the World Youth Alliance is one of the biggest coalitions of young people worldwide.*