Candidates’ Questionnaire – GB Elections 2019

Personal details

First and last name: Janis Fifka
Age: 26
National Committee: Germany
Nationality: German
Current occupation: Student / Freelancer
Member platform: [Is your profile on the Member Platform updated?] Yes
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Availability: [Are you able to dedicate 3-6 hours per week for the GB?] Yes
[Are you able to physically attend at least four events each year?] Yes

Questions for candidates

1. What would your aim and priorities as a GB member be, and with what mind-set will you pursue them?

For years now, the network has seen a constant grow. While the number of events kept raising, the quality and number of participants they aimed for could not always be met. I would like to help shaping the network as a learning organisation that promotes quality over quantity. The aim of the Governing Body should be there to identify certain problems that have been in place for a long time now and that seem to be constant confounding factors to the work of National Committees. We should find a balance to assist those struggling with a wide variety of issues as well as those that seem to be stuck in their status quo of decent development and therefore continuously contribute to international events. Having said this, and as I have left the decision-making level of my National Committee a while now, I would be very motivated to dedicate time, ideas and my experiences to motivate and support the National Committees to invest more of their resources into capacity building. The three focus areas I would like to contribute to in case of getting elected are strategic development, external relations and empowerment.

2. In your view, which EYP projects deserve more resources and which projects are less of a priority?

Strategic Development

Macro perspective: On my agenda the aspect of a long-term perspective in a youth-led organisation will have a clear priority, which is why I consider capacity building through the “Strengthening the EYP network” project or similar measures as key. The need to create a clear scheme in which all the efforts are positioned suggests further streamlining the offers of the international governance in order to make the network more sustainable and learning to grow. Pooling or separating mandates of Task Forces, Councils
and Working Groups around very specific outcomes will contribute to this very aim. Other events of the network shall be part of a holistic concept where the different elements are interconnected. A new element that could be added, would be training days on specific topics for selected National Committees taking place before the Meetings of the Board of National Committee. Knowing that we will work towards a new International Strategy in 2020, these Meetings as well as the Summer Academy should work as platforms for a bottom-up discussion on where to steer the EYP.

Micro perspective: To be successful with the strategic development of the whole network, we need to strengthen the individual National Committees from inside. In my opinion, a cornerstone that would need more attention to achieve this, is our member base. Sometimes I have the impression that while realising fantastic events for our participants, we might lack a valid set of measures helping to build structures both rewarding for our volunteers and relevant for the organisational success. Budget that is free to be used for purposes like member weekends are difficult to be secured or often get re-designated, which ultimately will lead to a boomerang effect. It is of high relevance to foster the long-term perspective and help the national boards to find a way around this dilemma. It would require supporting the acquisition of know-how and needed funding, as well as the provision of guidance in the implementation of a national strategy that evolves a day-to-day relevance.

External Relations

Macro perspective: In the context of making the EYP future-proof, I am also looking forward to further exploring ways where we can learn from and even cooperate with other organisations more. An aspect which is also important to me here, is to have a clear idea of our mandate and how we can execute it while disseminating the results of the young participants’ work and taking up a advocating role for them, without prioritising certain policy areas, such as energy topics, over others. While I congratulate funding successes and the EYP partnering with different organisations, I am of the belief that our network – as part of the 2020 strategy process – would profit from an open discussion on our common understanding of the EYP deviating between a solely educational programme and an actor that partners with stakeholders and channels young people’s opinions.

Micro perspective: I have observed that our network has developed a more and more professional external image. Though for many National Committees strategic communication still lacks everyday relevance as it seems too theoretical. I do not think there is a need for any specific new measure to be put in place, however exchanges with board members showed me that there is a need for enhancing the utilisation of the communication strategy through more one-on-one guidance. Moreover, the field of public relations still holds potential in our organisation. Media output shall not only be session-bound but covering values, cross-country topics or how the EYP can be featured around events, such as elections, through non-session activities and cooperating with other youth organisations.

Empowerment

Macro perspective: I certainly think that a culture that offers room for innovation, success and failure will ultimately contribute to a more sustainable organisation. Pooling existent and new ideas (e. g. EurVoice discussion evenings, press conference session element, grassroot projects in resolutions) should be made public the flow kept alive through annual iterations of exchange formats during the Summer Academy or Innovation Lab. Such a support mechanism which fosters try-outs of new ideas and in-depth work on the quality of existing formats and materials ideally, should beneficiate projects financially.
Learning from the past feedback, it is important to stress that non-session elements, outreach and small-scale events shall have a focus, too.

**Micro perspective:** Innovation shall also work as a vital component to further contribute to the EYP’s purpose to inspire young people to become active citizens. While it is important to motivate young people to continue doing EYP, we should put more efforts in paving the way for participants to connect their gained knowledge and skills with activism and political engagement in their societies. Therefore, I applaud past initiatives bridging the gap between our events and the outer world and I would like to motivate International Sessions and other events to work as models to follow in providing participants with activities by officials, experts or present Governing Body members covering both ways to continue the EYP and opportunities for societal engagement outside of our organisation. In order to ensure our network to display a diversity amongst the young people we reach out to, we should think of imposing more ambitious self-commitments, e. g. quota, when it comes to involving more participants with non-EYP background and participants from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds.

3. What personal skills, knowledge or experience will you bring to the board that will be needed to face the challenges that EYP is likely to encounter?

I consider myself as a person that is ready and able to question the given status-quo, thinking in with different perspectives to find new and unconventional solutions. Even though in situations that require fast decision-making I have proven to take a more pragmatic stance on things, I think it describes me the best, if I say that I want to offer my passion for visionary and well-thought-through ideas to the Governing Body and to the whole network. I value openness for a working environment that offers enough room for discussions and even sometimes theoretical experimenting – if we ultimately find a way to make it utilisable for the actors in our network, mainly the National Committees. As I work as a freelance and part-time assistant in the field of political education and public relations outside of the EYP, I can contrast the EYP bubble with some methods and perspectives I acquired there.

4. What experience do you have of non-profit management?

From 2015-2017 I served as a member of the board of EYP Germany for two years holding the portfolio of public relations and communications, including one year as Vice-President. As such I took care of the board’s communication, the agenda for two-weekly video conferences and four physical board meetings, patronage and guest management, and external representation. In 2013, 2015 and 2018 I (co-)head-organised an In-School-Session, a Regional Session and an International Forum. I have been part of the National Organising Committee of the 80th International Session in Leipzig 2015. Through my long-term involvement I was able to gain detailed insights into the execution of both small-scale and large events. Notably the curation of a good relationship with local partners and the successful application for an Erasmus+ grant of € 50,000 were key learning experiences for me. I have been a member of the Educational Council from 2017-2018, which published a new teachers’ guide as a result of its work. For 2019-2020 I am chairing the Development Council where so far, I have been focusing on the aspect of national strategies.

Outside EYP I have been active in several other non-profit organisations. From 2013-2017 I was board member and spokesperson to a local branch of a political party. In 2015 I was employed as full-time manager to the election campaign for lord mayor in my hometown, coordinating a big number of volunteers amongst our 1.700 members within more than 20 sub-branches. Next to that I was responsible for leading a small team of two more full-time staff members.