

# Yearly report of the Advisory Committee of FYEG (2009/2010)

The first-ever Advisory Committee of FYEG, elected in last year's General Assembly in Maastricht, was formed by **Maria Filleti**, **Jehki Härkönen** and **Marc Giménez**. This theoretically last-resource mediation body was, nevertheless, rather busy along the year, with two peak moments when its services were requested. This entailed in the need for a regular follow-up of the EC-email list to which it had access, as provided in the IRPs adopted in Maastricht. The purpose of this follow-up, focused on the form rather than the content, was to identify possible punctual misbehaviors or misunderstandings of the task division. Indeed, by reviewing internal communication within the EC, as a result of the first request for intervention, we realized that some problems were likely to take place. Conflicts due to overlapping of competences between the EC and Sec-Gen or lack of fulfillment of responsibilities could arise at some point.

## 1<sup>st</sup> request (August 2009):

This request came as a result of a conflict originated between two EC members, but it entailed a broader scope. The argument was between a member who had been already in the previous EC and a newly elected EC member who did not want to endorse and take a responsibility made by the previous EC. The issue was more complicated because there were some financial implications, since it was related to a financial investment to be recovered; that is, the production of birthday calendars to be sold. The problem was also that the initial investment was provided, as a loan, by a former EC member, who due to this refusal of the decision by the current EC kept without recovering her money. This person, supported by other members of the former EC, eventually complained to the current EC and Sec-Gen to recover the money back. This peculiar case had as effect that two people had a conflict of interests: on the one hand the person who had been both in the old and new ECs, and at least one member of the Advisory Committee that was a member of the former EC, and was therefore voluntarily recused and did not take part of the deliberation of the Advisory Committee.

In the end the conflict was solved, and moreover the person who had committed her personal money in order to help FYEG punctually recovered it. The Advisory Committee did, even though, issue their assessment and recommendation, which were the following:

- The board of an association carries **the responsibilities of the association**, no matter when decisions were taken, unless the decisions were taken lawlessly. Correspondingly, the former EC cannot be held responsible for consequences of decisions made legally during their mandate. The situation being what it is, however, the former EC can be asked to **voluntarily assist** in the selling of the calendars.
- Clear information on the **financial situation** need to be given to the whole of the current EC, including all outstanding debts, so that the EC is able to decide what steps need to be taken.
- The EC represents all FYEG member organisations in all of its outside communications. Therefore **all members of the current EC should act as a representative of the current EC and refrain from signing letters from outside the EC** even if they agree with the position implicated. The discussions of the EC may be confidential and should not be referred to any outside direction before the minutes of a meeting have been published.
- The AC would like to reiterate the importance of **confidentiality** of what happens and what is discussed. All information must stay within the EC and any discussion with third parties should have serious consequences, as it undermines the EC as well as the workings and trust of FYEG.
- The AC would like to reiterate from its previous conclusions that **personal issues should be brought out into the open and discussed, as they are hampering the working of the EC.**

- The EC spokespersons are responsible for co-ordinating the group. They should make themselves available. In cases of a serious conflict such as this, they should even make themselves available during holidays. Moreover, they have **indirectly fostered** the conflict by not fulfilling their duties agreed at the EC meeting.
- Members of the EC cannot decide to 'break off' from the rest of the EC to take individual decisions, send individual letters and hold discussions with only certain members of the EC. The **FYEG IRPs do not mention anything about disqualifying an EC member when treating certain issues**, each and every EC member was **voted for** at the General Assembly by the member organisations, therefore no one has the right to start acting as a separate group inside the EC unless specifically decided so by a normal decision making procedure.
- The AC would like to reiterate the importance of some kind of **team building**. This needs to take place; otherwise, unless all personal issues are put aside, the EC will not be able to function productively.
- The members of the EC must discuss issues with **respect** towards each other. This has not been the case in some of the emails, and should be redressed.
- As a last resort, if the current EC cannot work as a team, some or all of its members have to resign and provisional members have to be co-opted to take care of the opened positions until the next General Assembly. However, this is **extremely inadvisable and would greatly disturb the functioning of FYEG**.

### **2<sup>nd</sup> request: (February 2010):**

The second request of intervention by the Advisory Committee was posed by an EC member after an argument with the Sec-Gen through email, in which she claimed having been disqualified and insulted. This EC member asked as well for advice on the possibility of a dismissal procedure against the Secretary General for. After going through the documents it was checked that indeed such electronic conversation exchanges took place, with a tone and offenses deemed unacceptable and affirmation by the Sec-Gen. Then,

- After warning the Secretary General of the inappropriateness of this behavior and the possible consequences in case of it being repeated again, and that it seemed to be eventually understood;
- Being aware that the term of the mandate both of the EC and SecGen was coming to an end;
- And having into account that around the same dates the first clues about the possible existence of financial irregularities by the treasurer appeared, with all the administrative implications entailed by that;

the Advisory Committee pointed out the following:

“As stated in the Advisory Committees earlier comments and suggestions, there is a need for the whole EC to get involved in such issues, especially the spokespersons. The spokespersons don't seem to have any control over the working of the EC and from the emails that the Advisory Committee sees, it seems that the spokespersons are not even trying to rectify or control the situation.

The rest of the EC never involve themselves (on email at least) in any issues not directly related to their own personal selves. The lack of involvement from the other EC members has made every conflict situation worse as in this way, it remains a one – on – one conflict which tends to be a lot more biased. We see the spokespersons as responsible to mediate inter-EC conflicts, especially in a case where the Secretary General is a part of the conflict.

### *Suggestions from the Advisory Committee*

In the Advisory Committee's opinion, taking into consideration the current state of affairs, the current activities which are going on and also the fact that the EC and Secretary General's term are coming to an end, it is not advisable to relieve any person of their duties but instead maintain some distance if necessary and carry out the rest of the EC term.

On the other hand, it is advisable that the current EC presents an amendment of the IRPs at the next GA, putting forward a procedure for possible disciplinary action against the SG or an EC member who is not living up to their responsibilities.”

### **General comments and conclusions:**

It must be always regarded by new (and old) EC members that we are volunteer activists in an international environment. This poses a cross-cultural framework language barrier sometimes in our communications that cannot be overlooked from both sides of a conversation. This makes tolerance towards the others necessary more than ever, and respect to others opinions and to their dignity as persons is a must that if not respected is a reason enough to be dismissed. This reality also creates a strong need for team building at the beginning of the mandate, which needs to be maintained along the whole term.

When a conflict arises between some EC members or with the Sec-Gen, initially the most suitable sphere to handle it is within the team itself. This requires from the involvement of each member to an effective solving of the controversy. The inhibition of members not directly involved is therefore as well their personal failure. Special stress must be put on the spokespersons, who are supposed to offer a plus into maintaining the good team work and atmosphere.

Finally, in a self-evaluation of its task and its role within FYEG we consider that this body needs to be enhanced. It should not only be a conflict-resolution body, but rather a consultive committee on which the EC and Sec-Gen can trust fully and voluntarily ask for expert advice on the issue it considers necessary. This should also be an important tool for knowledge transfer to new EC members, especially when many unexperienced members come in together in a new EC. This is a very weak procedure so far within FYEG, and this is why we support the idea to convert the Advisory Committee into a Transfer or Wisdom Committee as discussed at the structure meeting in Berlin, with an increased number of members so as to have a higher support and collegiate decisions.