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Reasoned Recommendation
On the continuation of the full-time President

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The position of full-time President was first introduced at the Autumn Federal Committee (FC) in October 2018 for a trial period of one year until the European Congress in October 2019 (holder of the position: Christopher Glück). It was then reconfirmed for the full duration of the mandate 2019-21 (holder of the position: Leonie Martin) and the mandate 2021-23 (holder of the position: Antonio Argenziano). However, while this system is still nominally present, the current holder of the presidency, Christelle Savall (mandate 2023-25), ran herself as a volunteer for the position, which has effectively meant the freezing of the full-time presidency during the present mandate.

The 2023 Spring FC decided on several objectives for the role, tasking the Executive Board (EB) to:

1. Regularly monitor the benefits and risks of the full-time position in regular intervals, as well as report to the FC at every statutory meeting;
2. Submit to the Autumn FC 2024 a reasoned recommendation on the full-time position, beyond the mandate 2023-25;
3. Submit an internal resolution to that purpose at the Spring FC in 2025.

The EB during the previous mandate discussed the full-time role regularly during board meetings over the mandate, and Antonio – the then-President of JEF Europe – delivered mid-term reports to the 2022 Spring and Autumn FCs, as well as in the 2023 Spring FC and European Congress that Autumn.

The present reasoned recommendation is – in parallel and complementary to the President's reports – submitted to the FC to outline the advantages and disadvantages of the current arrangement, as identified by JEF Europe's Executive Board, and on the basis of which it gives a **positive recommendation to the Federal Committee regarding the continuation of the existence of the position of full-time president.**

To that extent, this reasoned recommendation also seeks to provide sections and JEFers with the information necessary to re-assess the position of JEF Europe President as a full-time position, in view of the vote on the internal resolution at the 2025 Spring FC.

The EB further gives recommendations to the next mandate holders, as per the adjustments and arrangements warranted by a continuation of the role.

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Delivery against the objectives as set out in the FC resolution

1. Operational capacity of the organisation

Objective

JEF Europe, during this mandate, has continued to operate on a substantial budget and, as a consequence, a large European Secretariat (with up to 8 employees at the peak during this mandate). However, this operational volume and the sudden turnover in secretariat staff -which is still to reach its full capacity, pending the fulfilling of multiple vacancies- has meant a radical increase in the volume of work that the whole EB, but particularly the President, have had to deal with that is of an operational nature. This has also reduced time resources for additional tasks of EB members, beyond following up on projects.

Result

This mandate has yet again set another record in JEF Europe activities. Still under a voluntary position, the President has managed to keep a detailed overview (and actively contribute/participate) to the activities carried out, while maintaining time resources for other tasks of the role, such as the contact to sections and political representation and lobbying work.

In spite of the voluntary nature of her position, the President has been deeply involved in the work of the Secretariat and has been involved in some of the Secretariat's tasks alongside the SG, as she has also taken part in recruitment processes and other HR work and decision-making, among others. The need for additional management roles presents itself with the expected maximum size of the Secretariat in the foreseeable future and will continue to stay as such or grow, depending on the growth of the organisation.

EB members feel, on the whole, that the quality of reporting on the work of the Secretariat is high, in particular thanks to the Secretariat update given by the Secretary General at each EB meeting, and that they were able to make informed decisions. Board members also generally have more time to invest in their own individual contributions, as the key EB priorities get communicated to the Secretariat, and the President can ultimately greenlight decisions on short notice, if need be.

Risks

The efficiency gains and added-value of a Secretariat depends on a fully involved President, who with the full trust of his/her board, is capable of exerting a coherent political direction to be implemented. For this very reason however,investing too much time in the Secretariat at the expense of the President's 'core task' of EB coordination risks damaging this fundamental relationship.

In spite of the voluntary exercise of the Presidency, Christelle has managed to strike this balance effectively, especially during such a delicate time of change in the Secretariat.

2. Strengthen the exchange between JEF Europe and sections

Objective

The infamous "gap" between the European, national, and local levels of European youth organisations is not unique to JEF, and to some extent will always exist; yet, we should address this divide as much as we can. The objective of the full-time role was also to make the European level more available and reachable, and give time to the EB to understand the needs of sections and members.

Result

The possibility for the President to attend seminars on weekdays has continued to exist under the current mandate's voluntary presidency, which has given the possibility to blend project work with the key political positions and advocacy work of JEF Europe, as well as meet JEFers and partner organisations. However, this shouldn't be taken for granted under any voluntary exercise of the presidency due to the fact that most full-time jobs don't provide the necessary flexibility to do so.

As in past mandates, the President is the contact person for fewer sections than other Executive Board Members. The current EB does not see a specific need for the full-time President to concentrate on section work as this important task is well distributed among the Executive Board. Moreover, the position of membership officer also increases the resources and time allocated to working with sections. The President remains available to have meetings with all sections should they wish to have one.

Risks

Sections are invited to keep maintaining a relationship with their designated EB contact points, despite the availability of the President. However, it must be noted that, on many occasions, sections have opted to contact the President directly, bypassing their contact person in the EB, which has contributed to an overburdening of the President and made the section follow-up work by the EB more challenging.

3. Increase JEF Europe's political advocacy and representation work

Objective

The full-time role should allow JEF to take up more opportunities for representation, build a better political network, and improve JEF's advocacy work.

Result

In spite of the presidency being carried-out on a voluntary basis this mandate, JEF Europe's advocacy work has continued to be visible and active. During the first half of the mandate, Christelle has taken on 219 opportunities of public representation of JEF Europe; 95 of those being related to the EurHope campaign. This has allowed for JEF Europe to continue displaying a highly visible advocacy work and become a reference for youth organisations

during the EP 2024 election. Similarly, the presence in Brussels on a stable basis of other EB members has contributed to the continued advocacy presence of JEF in the EU affairs sector and in civil society spaces.

In the same way, and in spite of carrying out the presidency duties on a voluntary basis, Christelle has managed to take part in multiple project events and partner meetings.

Risks

There is a risk that, while able to respond to more event invitations, the full-time President would not proactively seek and hold meetings with MEPs and other relevant figures for our advocacy. The risk is, at present and in general, considered to be low. The risk can be offset by rolling out and using to a wider extent the CRM database - where interactions can be logged, monitored, and reported on - for its political advocacy. Use of the database would also allow the EB, and JEF at large, to quantify informal meetings (such as “coffee meetings”). Moreover, meetings held by the President might not systematically advance JEF's policy objectives. However, regular reporting on the meetings, and the President's strong involvement in the setting of JEF-Europe political priorities, address the risk.

Challenges and disadvantages

Role distinction between Secretary General (SG) and President

Having structured the Secretariat in thematic teams (policy, communications, projects) has helped to maintain the distinction between the roles. In turn, the President needs to maintain a political, but not operational view of the projects involving JEF Europe. However, the current situation of understaffing has made this thematic team distribution difficult to achieve.

Risk that President might become “part of the Secretariat” rather than “part of the Board” or end up taking over Secretariat duties

As discussed, there is a clear advantage in the daily involvement of the President in the Secretariat’s work. It is the responsibility of the President to maintain their role as a political steer of the organisation. However, due to the current situation of understaffing within the Secretariat, both the President and the rest of the EB -all volunteers- have had to step in and take over tasks traditionally within the realm of the staff.

Costs and financial sustainability

The full-time president is a rather costly expense for the organisation. The added-value needs to be evaluated against its opportunity costs and the financial situation of the organisation.

The current operating grant under the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Value programme of the European Union creates certainty of funding for the future mandate. It is also possible to fund the position partially through other streams, like the grants related to the European elections. Funding is therefore secured until end-2025. There is an ongoing effort between the

Secretariat and the Treasurer to diversify JEF's income via its fundraising strategy. This may, in the medium-term, open new avenues to make the funding of the full-time President position more predictable.

To offer the President a full-time position is a tradeoff as this money could be used to cover other staff. Similarly, should JEF run out of other money than the operating grant (no project other than the operating grant) during a mandate we could not cover all staff. Moreover, paying the President could create frictions/misunderstandings that some board members are paid and some are not in future mandates.

The fact that the presidency has been exercised on a voluntary basis during this current mandate, which has at moments been financially challenging due to external factors unrelated to JEF Europe, with the liberation of funding that this has meant, has allowed for the network to count on an additional cash flow that has allowed for it to continue to pay providers and salaries.

Personal challenges of the change from a volunteer position to a fulltime one

Becoming a full-time president is an adjustment as it requires learning a new way of commitment, different day planning and a new role of manager of paid staff which can be new to some volunteers. Cumulating daywork and volunteer hours matching other EB members' schedules could put a strain on the President.

Moreover, shifting from volunteer to full time is an adjustment all the more so difficult when combined with relocating from a different country. When the President, like in the previous mandate, lives in a different city, the full-time scheme creates an additional burden on the mandate holder who leaves their job/studies, habits and social life behind. While the risk depends on the mandate holder, their personality and past experiences, it is to be expected that a transition period would be required before the next mandate holder takes full ownership of the role, which can be alleviated with support from other Executive Board members with previous EB experience, including the Secretary General.

However, under a volunteer-based presidency, the challenges remain there. Given the continued existence of the full-time presidency for over five years -between 2018 and 2023- without a break, working dynamics within successive EBs and the JEF network as a whole have effectively shifted the perception of the presidency of JEF Europe towards one considering that, by nature, the position should carry a heavier burden than most voluntary-based youth NGO president roles tend to have. This has set too high of a bar, when it comes to workload for most volunteers to handle effectively, which may eventually lead to most -if not all- prospective candidates who would be willing to take the presidency on a voluntary basis to turn their backs on that possibility.

Professional nature of the role might attract a different set of candidates in the long run and restrict the pool of candidates

This is a risk to be watched, on two accounts: on the one side, that candidates for President do not see the position merely as a job, but rather as a way to empower them to carry out more tasks and achieve more results; on the other side, that the professionalisation of the

President's role does not irreversibly deter candidates who may be willing and able to carry out their duties as volunteers.

While allowing anyone to dedicate their full time to the organisation, regardless of their current place of residence / occupation, the full-time position might restrict the pool of candidates by requiring them to leave everything behind for the association.

In addition to regular monitoring and reporting to JEF statutory bodies, the EB recommends to make the funding available to support a President to do the position full-time (or even part-time), but that a candidate seeking to run on an unpaid basis would be able to do so in the resolution to be adopted at the 2025 Spring FC to ensure candidacies to the position.

Recommendations going forward

1. The EB recommends the continuation of the full-time role for the next mandate, to be re-evaluated taking into account the financial resources of JEF Europe on an ongoing basis, and no later than by the incoming EB at the Autumn FC 2026.

2. The primary focuses of the President should be:

    a. Political representation,

    b. Leading and coordinating the Executive Board,

    on top of working with sections, when relevant (as a contact person or as support to others).

3. In spite of the continuation of the full-time presidency formula, the exercise of the presidency on a voluntary basis should still remain an option available to possible candidates so as to not deprive willing members from the possibility of running, as well as to avoid excessively limiting the pool of possible candidates.

4. While the President is the lead figure in the organisation, the distribution of tasks within the EB is meant to allow for the remaining board members to take the lead in specific work areas and, thus, relieve the person holding the presidency of an excess of tasks. Therefore, the position of other EB members as reference points for specific policy areas, sections, and projects should be strengthened and both sections and JEF members should take that into account when contacting the EB to avoid unnecessarily overburdening the President.

5. The distinction between SG and President should continue to be made clear, also to staff, in particular to new staff joining the Secretariat and with particular regards to management decisions, with the exception of the policy officer who chiefly relies on the guidance of the President to carry out their tasks.

6. The President should, in tandem with the SG, coordinate timely input of the EB on future and on-going projects.

7. The President provides a brief update to the Secretariat, at the start of each internal team meeting, on the political agenda agreed upon by the EB, explicitly relating project work to JEF's federalist mission.

8. The President provides monthly updates of their advocacy work to the Executive Board to reduce the asymmetry of information.