

AEJ Annual General Meeting via Zoom, 11am, 20th January 2021

MINUTES

A Virtual AGM. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK Section of the Association of European Journalists (AEJ) held its annual general meeting and review of events in 2020 in virtual format by means of Zoom.

Attendance. Chairman: William Horsley. Secretary: Charles Jenkins. Treasurer: David Worsfold. Meetings Secretary: Peter Norman. Website Manager: David Barker. Social Media editor: Firdevs Robinson. 19 members joined the Zoom call. Apologies had been received from Maggie Hughes, Nicholas Nugent, Claudia Hamill and Diana Maxwell.

Chairman's Report. (Attached). William Horsley welcomed participants to the UK Section's first virtual annual meeting. Introducing his report for 2020, he said the AEJ was more than a social and professional grouping. It formed part of the public dialogue on very serious events in the world. Conscious of that, the UK section kept its website full and up to date with information for members and visitors. Similarly, the relationship with Regent's University gave the section "an extra dimension" with a serious academic organisation and he looked forward to in-person meetings at Regent's being possible again. He thanked the section's elected officers and all other members who had worked to keep the UK section functioning in 2020, and noted with satisfaction that membership was steady at 40.

Secretary's Report. (Attached). Charles Jenkins reported on a mostly smooth transition from in-person to Zoom meetings. The section held three in-person meetings at Regent's University early in 2020 before Covid and associated lockdowns.. While hoping to restore in-person meetings when feasible, Charles noted that Zoom allowed the AEJ to successfully organise five meetings between June and December, three of which were with speakers in other countries and continents.

Social Media. At William's invitation, Social Media editor, Firdevs Robinson, reported on the UK Section's social media activities, stressing their importance. She outlined a problem with the section's Facebook account, following a change in that company's policy. This would mean the creation of a new account in a few days' time. A discussion followed on how the section might strengthen its social media profile. Members were encouraged to contribute "likes" and comments to its Facebook and Twitter pages. Doros Partasides was thanked for contributing high-quality photographs to the Section's social media output.

Treasurer's Report and proposal to maintain membership dues at £40 per year. (Attached). David Worsfold said 2020 had ended with a surplus for the second year running after several years of losses. Turnover was sharply lower than in 2019 reflecting the switch from face-to-face lunchtime events to Zoom. He recommended that the section keep its annual membership fee unchanged at £40 because of great uncertainty about future developments. There was "no visibility" on when in-person meetings might resume while they could return with increased costs. The meeting approved the £40 membership fee without dissent.

Election of Officers. William Horsley (Chairman), Charles Jenkins (Secretary), and David Worsfold (Treasurer) were proposed for re-election by former Section chairman Rick Thompson. All officers were re-elected unopposed for 2021 to general acclaim.

AEJ UK Meetings and Activities. Meetings secretary, Peter Norman, gave an oral report looking ahead to 2021. The UK Section would continue to use Zoom and make use of its capacity to facilitate meetings with speakers outside the UK. He was working closely with William to select and approach potential speakers in 2021. A meeting on Russia is planned in February. Other topics might include the UK's future relations with the EU, the performance of US President Joe Biden and the November COP26 Conference in Glasgow which would bring climate change back to the top of the agenda.

Peter saw an important role for the AEJ UK as providing a forum for civilised debate in difficult times and pointed out that our meetings now regularly attract prominent journalists and editors of national media titles. He stressed the need to secure high-quality speakers for the existing membership and the future. Good speakers helped the section to recruit younger, active journalist members who then would make it more worthwhile for good speakers to come to its events. The UK section would also continue to invite active non-AEJ journalists from the foreign press and prestigious publications whom speakers (and their gatekeepers) would see as important audience members. This policy was pursued with some success in 2020. He urged members to suggest themes and speakers while advising that speaker suggestions should be accompanied by up-to-date contact details.

A lively discussion followed. Several members backed the idea of hybrid meetings in the future where traditional in-person meetings would also be transmitted by Zoom to widen their appeal. There was support too for reviving the UK section's relations with the EU Commission office in London post-Brexit. Several members backed a future meeting focusing on South Korea, noting its success in combatting Covid, its technological prowess and its emergence as a significant medium sized power. A suggestion that the AEJ take more action in countries that do not respect the media allowed William to explain his extensive activities as the International AEJ's media freedom representative.

International AEJ Update. The meeting had a wide-ranging discussion about the International AEJ, reviewing its inability to hold an annual membership meeting last year in conformity with its statutes, and the plans for an online general meeting on February 15th to vote on membership of its board and other positions, although not to address other matters of concern to the membership. The UK Section holds 4 votes (on the basis of one vote per ten members). Members voiced strong support for William Horsley continuing as the International AEJ's media freedom representative, underlining his hard work and effectiveness for the cause. They took special note of the outspoken appreciation for his work expressed by responsible organisations including the Council of Europe. Many AEJ sections had expressed gratitude for William's interventions and advocacy on behalf of journalists at risk of violence, reprisals and censorship.

AOB. There was no other business and the AGM closed at around 12.40PM

Peter Norman