

AEJ UK SECTION -- CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 2016

Last year was very sadly marked by the death in May of our former Secretary and Treasurer, Celia Hampton. Many tributes to her from friends and colleagues in the UK and abroad are published on aej-uk.org.

The Brexit vote in June and other political convulsions of 2016 thrust Europe to the centre of a fevered public debate that still shows no sign of calming down. The polarisation of public attitudes on the best approach to Brexit was accompanied by a critical focus on the role of mass Internet sites like Facebook in the proliferation of 'fake news', and by accusations that the mainstream media has so far failed to expose false claims or inform the public properly.

Our lunchtime meetings in 2016 featured outstanding speakers on different sides of the political battleground before and after the referendum vote, bringing near-record attendance for some meetings. As always, we aim to keep up a good mixture of topical speakers from the UK, Europe and beyond.

The standing arrangement with City University London, coordinated with James Rodgers who now runs the International Journalism MA course there, enabled more than 20 City students took part as guests of the Section under our Journalism Students Support scheme, which is the brainchild of our late colleague Frank Gray.

International AEJ Congress in Kilkenny, Ireland: Six UK Section members attended the annual Congress and General Assembly in medieval Kilkenny. I was re-elected as one of 3 international vice-presidents, with special responsibility for the AEJ's media freedom activities, and David Lennon joined Mike Springate on the international Audit Committee. Resolutions were adopted in defence of press freedom in Turkey and Poland; so was an appeal to the European Commission to re-consider a decision to end funding for Euranet Plus, a highly-regarded project providing reliable EU-related news to radio listeners across Europe.

Website: Thanks to our website editor, David Barker, the website www.aej-uk.org now has lively areas covering Trumpism, Brexit and the meaty debates at the AEJ Congress in Ireland last October, as well as future Event information, highlights from the AEJ international website www.aej.org and prompt write-ups of most of our meetings.

UK Section on social media: Firdevs Robinson has taken on the lead role in building the UK Section's profile on Facebook and Twitter; both accounts were activated late in 2016. We want to use social media to reach a wider cross-section of journalists in and around London. Firdevs posts AEJ related information and photos about our meetings and activities, and retweets freedom of the media-focused news and comment. Please have a look @aej_uk for Twitter and <https://www.facebook.com/ukaej/> for Facebook and boost our online presence as much as possible.

Looking ahead: The UK's path towards Brexit may have an unwelcome impact on the Section in time, as we cannot be sure how long Europe House, which houses the European Commission and European Parliament offices in London, will be available to us as our regular meetings venue. But we fully expect the UK Section to continue to thrive even after such time as the UK gives up its membership of the EU.

Next year, 2018, is the 50th anniversary of the birth of the AEJ UK Section and some preliminary planning is already being done about how we may mark it properly. Your support will be especially appreciated as we approach the anniversary year.

Elected officers and other key roles: Our grateful thanks are due to all for the excellent work done again in the past year. Margaret Hughes and Mike Springate have agreed to remain as Secretary and Treasurer; David Lennon will continue as Events Director while David Barker takes care of the website.

William Horsley, January 2017