

AEJ UK CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO THE AGM ON 29 January 2020

Welcome to the Annual Members Meeting!

Firstly, we pause to remember one of the AEJ UK Section's most long-standing members, Bob Elphick, who sadly died last year. He was a celebrated Reuters and BBC correspondent who reported from Moscow in the Cold War and covered the crushing of the Prague Spring.

AEJ UK Officers:

Margaret Hughes, our Secretary for the last ten years, is stepping down from that position today. She has generously given us the benefit of her unstinting time and effort for all that time despite suffering from health problems during part of last year. I am immensely grateful to her on behalf of all members for helping to keep the show on the road for all this time.

Charles Jenkins has also been helping as acting Secretary in recent months. He now agrees to take on the role at a time when the UK Section has expanded our membership to a new record high. I especially welcome new members, including several with Times and FT pedigrees who have very recently joined.

Treasurer David Worsfold is bringing our budget management into the 21st century by encouraging a shift to online banking and pre-payment of fees for attending lunchtime meetings as far as possible. The aim is to minimise a wasteful loss of income from no-shows, while ensuring fair treatment for those who cancel after having registered. That system, together with careful discipline over placing the catering orders for events, has allowed us to start breaking even on most lunchtime events through the year.

Peter Norman has contributed greatly as Meetings secretary to our array of stimulating Lunchtime Speakers. 2020 looks like being another bumper year. As always, suggestions for attractive speakers – especially when they come with up-to-date contact details – are welcome. Members should please send any ideas to me wh@williamhorsley.com and Peter on pgnorman@blueyonder.co.uk.

Website manager David Barker david@interlaser.net regularly refreshes the site www.aej-uk.org with write-ups by willing members of our Lunchtime meetings and special events such as the September 2019 Scotland trip, as well as selected items from the AEJ's international website and one-off articles and blogs.

And for social media users Firdevs Robinson keeps up the Section's active profile with news and photos on Facebook and Twitter, as well as publishing her own weekly TalkTurkey blog.

Venue: During 2019 Europe House in London, which houses the European Commission, became unavailable to us because of Brexit planning. We are very grateful to Regent's University London for their hospitality in enabling us to hold our regular meetings here with the attendance of some of their students and staff.

International: The International AEJ's Congress was held in early December in the UNESCO Building in Paris, with enlightening panel sessions with strong speakers -- on rising threats to media freedom in Europe; the rise of disinformation and false news; actions to protect women

journalists against extreme harassment and discrimination; and the struggle for survival by public broadcasters across Europe.

The open-ended season of strikes affecting Eurostar and air travel as well as local transport in Paris began on December 4th, just before the Congress, forcing the cancellation of participation by three of the eight original AEJ members who had registered to attend.

The international AEJ's 2019 General Assembly was held at Jean Monnet House outside Paris. Klaus Welle, the EP's Secretary-General (chief administrator), gave AEJ members from all over Europe a special briefing on the new political landscape in the European parliament after the EP elections in May. Charles Jenkins' summary is up on the UK website.

Media Freedom: In my role as the AEJ's Media Freedom Representative and a member of the 8-person international AEJ Board I co-wrote with others the 2019 Annual Report of the official 'partner organisations' of the Council of Europe. The Report was launched at a special event in the EP in Brussels in February. There are now 14 Partners, including the AEJ, EFJ, RSF and others, which contribute to the unique Europe-wide system of alerts about attacks against journalists and press freedom by reporting over 150 incidents each year on the website www.coe.int/fom. The 2019 Annual Report received unprecedented international media coverage, and the Platform partners are now regularly invited to dialogues with the Council of Europe's Secretary-General on actions to strengthen the protections for journalists, especially in countries where they are often the targets of violence and judicial harassment or imprisonment + The Partners' 2020 Report is due to be published in early March

I am closely involved with other MF-related initiatives through London-based forums and groups including Reporters Without Borders' UK bureau and dedicated advocacy groups dealing with Turkey and Malta; plus the UK-inspired Global Media Freedom Campaign that was launched in London in July 2019 at the largest ever gathering of its kind with over 100 governmental delegations in attendance. For more details see the FCO website.

International website: In coordination with AEJ UK members and colleagues from other AEJ Sections around Europe, I and others also post original reports and news items on the AEJ's international site www.aej.org about AEJ-related news and topical media freedom developments. All members are welcome to register (a simple process) to access the "Members-only" pages which include records of annual AEJ Congresses. The site also carries thematic items written by the AEJ Special Representative for Disinformation & Fake News; and other events of interest in Brussels and elsewhere to AEJ members across Europe.

Please feel free, as always, to share your comments and any fresh ideas about the Section's doings.

William Horsley, January 2020