

AEJ UK SECTION CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR 2020, William Horsley, Jan 7, 2021

It is pleasing that we have been able to keep up our Section membership of 40 despite the special difficulties of the year. Several members reported having suffered more or less severely from contracting Covid. In that light I especially wish everyone a safe year of good health throughout this new year.

In 2020 the Section was hit by the Force 10 storm of Covid 19, but we scrambled successfully into the sturdy lifeboat of ZOOM, which happily (nearly all) our members have mastered.

We have experienced some minor technical glitches during my apprenticeship in hosting Zoom meetings, but I and others have benefited from the advice of more digitally advanced members.

On the plus side, we have made every effort to ensure that AEJ UK online Meetings are inter-active, with maximum opportunity for members and other participants to put questions in person or in writing.

We are very grateful to Regent's University London for agreeing to host our in-person Lunchtime meetings, of which we were able to hold three before the first Lockdown in March. The partnership between the AEJ and the University is proving to be of real value to both sides. In the medium term it is hoped that we may further develop the relationship to mutual advantage by holding occasional joint meetings, which could be of a more ambitious nature – all subject, of course, to the future behaviour of the virus, and the progress of efforts to end the pandemic.

I thank everyone who has worked to keep the Section's wheels turning: firstly Charles Jenkins for his capable management of the workload as UK Secretary. We have been able, despite the interruptions caused by Covid, to maintain our strong links with, and participation, of many members of the Foreign Press Association, as well as others who have been regulars at our lunchtime meetings in the past.

David Worsfold has brought the important skills of a financial journalist to the role of Treasurer. He has exercised great patience and persistence to obtain fully functioning online banking for the AEJ-UK, after many months of bureaucratic barriers and delays at the hands of our bank.

Charles, David and I are happy to continue in our roles as the elected officers of the Section during 2021, with the approval of the membership.

Peter Norman has worked with much success as Meetings Secretary to land many of our strong array of Event speakers. Peter has also written most of the informative summaries of our Speakers meetings over the past year, with others produced by Rick Thompson and myself.

David Barker has continued to keep our website up to date with news of our own activities, including audio recordings of most meetings, and items of interest published on the international AEJ website, as well as headlines on seminal events related to Brexit and UK-EU relations. And Firdevs Robinson has helpfully curated the AEJ UK's social media output and presence with topical content.

We also thank our colleague Doros Partasides, whose excellent photos from our Events over the past several years have featured in much of the UK Section's social media output.

International AEJ matters: As I mentioned in a message to members some months ago, it has not been possible thanks to the pandemic to hold the usual autumn in-person Annual AEJ Congress and General Assembly in 2020. After much uncertainty and internal debate the outlook now is that a limited kind of AEJ General Assembly will be held online on February 15th, including elections for the statutory positions on the international Board. Ballot-casting in those elections will be done confidentially, as the UK and other Sections have consistently advocated. We have also made clear that we want attendance at the meeting, as in the past and as foreseen in the International AEJ's Statutes, to be open to several members of each section. So far we still await an assurance on that point, and will update members on that as soon as possible.