



ASSOCIATION OF EUROPEAN JOURNALISTS

## **AEJ UK Section: Secretary's 2019 Annual Report for the AGM on January 29 2020**

**By Charles Jenkins, Acting UK Secretary**

2019 has been an outstandingly successful year for AEJ-UK in terms of membership, which reached a record 44. The ongoing drama over Brexit has again been a dominant theme of our lunchtime meetings but three meetings focused on other international topics.

The section also made a highly informative trip in September to visit the Scottish Parliament, including a lively AEJ panel discussion among rival Conservative, Labour and Scottish Nationalist MSPs. The MSPs all agreed that the prospect of Brexit on terms unwelcome to Scottish voters had shifted the popular mood there towards demands for a new referendum on independence. The result of the December 12 UK general election has duly raised expectations north of the border of another chance to vote on keeping or ending the 300-year union of Scotland with England although Boris Johnson has vowed not to concede one.

In February Bill Browder, a leading investor in post-Soviet Russia, critic of the regime of Vladimir Putin and promoter of the US Magnitsky Act (named after his lawyer who died in a Russian jail) told the AEJ about his high-profile personal campaign to expose high-level corruption and abuse in Russia.

In May, strategic and financial analyst Brunello Rosa of Rosa-Roubini spoke soon after the European Parliament elections to argue that populism across Europe has not been contained by the elections. And in June George Magnus, the author of *Red Flags: Why Xi's China is in Jeopardy*, highlighted four serious mid-term risks he says face China's economy -- from debt, currency, ageing, and lower foreign investment and trade disputes with the US.

The year's first Brexit-related meeting in March was with the former UK Ambassador to the EU, Sir Ivan Rogers, who was forced out thanks to his outspoken disagreement with the government's handling of the negotiations. Recent events have largely proved him right. He also predicted correctly that Theresa May's Conservative government would be replaced by a more right-wing one. In April Professor Robert Hazell, founder of the Constitution Unit at University College London, argued that the political turmoil surrounding parliament's failure to forge a coherent path to Brexit was not the result of any faults in the UK's unwritten constitution, but of the deep split in the governing Conservative Party and its failure to address the problems of governing with a minority.

On September 24<sup>th</sup>, Catherine Barnard, professor of EU Law at Cambridge University, spoke immediately after the UK Supreme Court's decision to annul the controversial five-week prorogation (suspension) of parliament imposed by Boris Johnson two weeks earlier.

**She gave a lucid interpretation of the court's damning judgement against the government, and warned that even if the UK and the EU could agree and implement a Withdrawal Agreement, negotiations on a future trade deal and other aspects of the post-Brexit relationship would be immensely difficult.**

**In October Lord David Willetts, a former Conservative Science and Universities Minister who is now a leading figure in the Resolution Foundation social-economic Think Tank, analysed the rising discontent among large parts of the UK population related to sweeping globalisation and the financial crash of ten years ago. And on November 20<sup>th</sup> Peter Ricketts, former UK National Security adviser and top diplomat, shared his highly critical analysis of the consequences of the lack of strategic thinking about Britain's place in a more uncertain post-Brexit world.**

**Summaries - written by various AEJ members - of our meetings with newsmakers and insiders can be accessed on our website together with full reports on special events like our Scotland visit and the November 2019 Press Seminar in the European Parliament in Brussels,**

**The office-holders of the AEJ UK Section's Committee in 2019 were:**

Chairman: **William Horsley**

Secretary: **Margaret Hughes**

Acting Secretary: **Charles Jenkins**

Treasurer: **David Worsfold**

***Other responsibilities:***

Meetings Secretary: **Peter Norman**

Website Manager: **David Barker** [www.aej-uk.org](http://www.aej-uk.org)