



## **AEJ UK CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2021**

In 2021 our long-standing AEJ colleague and prolific journalist Jonathan Fryer died after a short illness. The UK Section published fulsome tributes from people who knew him on our website.

The section's membership has remained level at about 40. I sincerely thank Charles Jenkins and David Worsfold for their excellent work and support, as well as website manager David Barker, who undertook with expert help to re-design the website with attractive layout and contents ready for its re-launch this month. Former meetings secretary Peter Norman moved to West Yorkshire during the year; he remains an active section member although his regular presence among us in London is much missed.

The Covid pandemic obliged us to hold all our 2021 professional meetings online. Despite members' regrets that we could not enjoy our habitual symposium-style in-person meetings, the online format had a significant benefit in that we could invite distinguished speakers from foreign places like Moscow, Berlin and Lithuania to enrich our understanding of momentous events across Europe.

Meetings were well attended, including by UK-based foreign journalists and in some case by colleagues from other AEJ national sections. Our members again volunteered to write up all the meetings for wider circulation and publication on the AEJ UK website. The website has become a valuable archive thanks to those written reports and audio recordings from our professional meetings and other published materials over recent years.

Since 2019 we have developed a fruitful partnership with Regent's University, which continues generously to welcome our use of on-campus venues including Herringham Hall. University teaching staff and students regularly participate in our in-person and online meetings. The section also has mutually beneficial relations with organisations including the Foreign Press Association, the Commonwealth Journalists Association, and the Euro Atlantic Group.

### **International**

Members of AEJ national sections across Europe have not had an opportunity to meet since the Congress and Assembly in Paris in December 2019 because of disruption caused by the Covid pandemic. Participation in two virtual General Assemblies in 2021 was limited to a small number of representatives of each section.

An online General Assembly meeting of the international AEJ was held in February 2021, at which I was re-appointed as Media Freedom Representative and a member of the international Board for a further two years. For full details of the make-up of the international AEJ Board following elections and other information see <https://aej.org/about-the-aej/>. A second online GA was convened in November 2021, mainly to approve the international AEJ's accounts.

The online Assembly meeting of last February was held over from 2020 amid Covid-related uncertainties. In 2021 plans were shared with UK members to hold an in-person General Assembly in Greece in September

2021. However the plans were first delayed because of Covid-related travel restrictions, and then cancelled on account of the disastrous fires in parts of central Greece in the autumn.

The next in-person General Assembly and Congress are scheduled to be held, again in Greece, in about November 2022. Details will be shared with UK members as soon as they are known. The French and Belgian AEJ Sections invited participation by other national sections in several online meetings in 2021; invitations to register were circulated to UK members.

## **Media Freedom**

Violent attacks against journalists and other forms of hostility to the work of independent media have come to be closely associated with a rise in authoritarian trends across Europe in 2021, and defending media freedom and government accountability is now a high priority for the Council of Europe and the EU.

The AEJ is active on behalf of its members and journalists at risk across Europe. We also cooperate closely with partners to monitor and strengthen protections against all forms of attack.

The AEJ played a leading role in prompting the launch in 2015 of the Council of Europe's online monitoring system against attacks on media freedom, the Platform for the safety of journalists [www.coe.int/fom](http://www.coe.int/fom) . In 2021 the Platform published over 260 "alerts" about individual attacks and other serious threats to media freedom. The AEJ is one of the 14 international journalistic and civil society organisations including the European Federation of Journalists and RSF which are active partners in this project. In April 2022 the Council of Europe partner organisations are due to publish and campaign on the basis of a hard-hitting annual report outlining developments in 2021 with practical proposals for stronger measures to combat the assault on press freedom.

My **2021 AEJ Media Freedom Representative annual report** is included with documents circulated for the AGM.

*William Horsley, January 2022*