

## **AEJ MF SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE ANNUAL REPORT OCTOBER 2022, WILLIAM HORSLEY – Sent on 19 October 2022**

AEJ Friends and colleagues, Because of personal and family circumstances this is my last Annual Report as AEJ MF Representative. I said several weeks ago that I will give up that title and role, which I have been privileged to fulfil for more than 10 years. I am proud that as AEJ MF Representative I won Observer status for our association at the Council of Europe's important Media Steering Committee. In 2015 I played a key part in starting up the Platform for the safety of journalists. The Platform has enabled many AEJ Sections to raise cases and make European governments face up to their legal obligations on media freedom based on the legally binding European Convention on Human Rights.

However I still want to help the AEJ in future in a more limited way by ensuring the continuation of the AEJ's contribution to the Platform and the Council of Europe's efforts to improve protections for media freedom. Irina Nedeva and Maria Chereseva of AEJ Bulgaria have closely supported my work as the main AEJ Contact Person, and say in future they are prepared to become the lead coordinators of AEJ alerts on the Platform. I am willing and able to provide support and guidance to them to fulfil the strict terms of the Council of Europe's Platform alerts and contribute to other Council of Europe activities...I commend this joint proposal with AEJ Bulgaria to the AEJ Board and General Assembly for approval, as part of the AEJ's ongoing media freedom efforts.

**THE 2022 SHOCK:** The AEJ and journalists across Europe had a seismic shock as Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February was accompanied by exponential new attacks on free and independent journalism. The Putin government's military aggression was matched by a massive escalation of its mendacious propaganda war and attempts to destroy all independent sources of information in Russia. Other Council of Europe states swiftly voted to expel Russia from the continent's treaty-based human rights body for flagrant violations of its human rights commitments.

In the past ten years the AEJ has established itself in the forefront of monitoring, warning and acting against political moves to stifle press freedom, not only in Russia and Belarus but in all parts of Europe. The past year witnessed the Turkish government's defiance of a final ultimatum from the European Court of Human Rights which ordered the release from jail of Osman Kavala, a publisher and philanthropist who had been unlawfully held on false charges for more than four years. Instead, Kavala was given a life sentence by a Turkish court. These alarming escalations were warned of by the AEJ and others but many European governments went on ignoring demands to strengthen legal and political safeguards.

**STRATEGIC WORK AND RESULTS:** As AEJ Representative I contributed directly to vital policy decisions to protect media independence and pluralism. In 2015 I signed for the AEJ the agreement with the Council of Europe Secretary General which co-founded the online Platform for the safety of journalists with EFJ/IFJ, RSF and Article 19. It enables us, in coordination with other press freedom groups, to publish verified media freedom Alerts which the Council's Secretariat sends to the member states to call for remedial actions and systematic reforms [https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result\\_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016806415d9#\\_ftn1](https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016806415d9#_ftn1) .

There are now 15 Platform partner organisations including Justice for Journalists and the Rory Peck Foundation freelance support organisation. The 2021 alerts show that journalists were murdered in targeted killings in Greece, the Netherlands and Turkey; one died in Georgia in violence at a street protest, and two from landmines in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Over 7 years the Platform has built a unique data base with detailed evidence of attacks on the media, listed under Physical assaults, Acts of intimidation, Imprisonment, Impunity, and Other forms of interference and barriers to reporting. The alerts also publish State Replies and relevant information about each case which can be cited in journalists' dealings with national state authorities [www.coe.int/fom](http://www.coe.int/fom) .

Last year the Platform published a record 282 alerts highlighting specific threats to the media in 35 member states. Many alerts are of direct concern to AEJ Sections and members, related to e.g. attacks on journalists at street protests, closures of critical media, verbal abuse, and selective barriers to reporting. See <https://fom.coe.int/en/ressources> for helpful Thematic Reports on European standards based on the Convention and case law of the ECtHR; also key "soft law" Guidelines showing what States' obligations really are; past Annual Reports by Platform Partners, and Special publications.

The Platform continues, after Russia's expulsion from the Council, to register alerts about crimes and attacks against journalists inside Russia and by Russian forces in Ukraine. Up to mid-October at least 12 civilian journalists were killed as a result of Russia's invasion. The Partners aim in future to extend the coverage of Platform alerts to include

Kosovo and Belarus. The AEJ co-wrote the past four Platform Annual Reports and kept up intensive advocacy efforts including direct dialogues with European governments. These opportunities have given the AEJ and other stakeholders a significant say in shaping the media freedom policies of the Council of Europe as well as the European Commission and the Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Other significant achievements are the landmark 2016 Committee of Ministers Recommendation on the safety of journalists and the protection of journalism; and the 2021 EU Recommendation on the safety of journalists and its recent announcement of a Media Freedom Act to defend media pluralism and independence, as well as an Anti-SLAPP Directive against abusive legal actions. The EU has opened the door to more meaningful consultation with press freedom organisations, including in drawing up the annual Rule of Law reports. These advances can be used to inform and support actions in national Sections. Collectively, the AEJ should continue and strengthen actions in solidarity and support to our members and other journalists who are harassed or at risk.

#### **SELECTED 2022 HIGHLIGHTS:-**

February 7: AEJ Cyprus Hybrid Debate on Media Freedom and Critical Journalism in Cyprus and Europe – speeches by AEJ President Saia Tsaousidou and MF Representative William Horsley

March: The MF Rep obtained AEJ membership of the Coalition Against SLAPPs in Europe (C.A.S.E) - SEE <https://www.the-case.eu/> (Actin coordinated with AEJ Hon President Otmar Lahodinsky)

April 27: Platform partners present the 2022 Annual Report covering 2021, with additional section on Russia's invasion, at hybrid Event at Brussels Press Club. AEJ Sections were invited.

May 3: World Press Freedom Day in Uruguay on “Journalism under Digital Siege”. UNESCO WPF Prize awarded to the Belarusian Association of Journalists (BAJ) which has been forcibly dissolved.

May 18: Platform Report presented at UK Parliament public event: Speakers included W. Horsley; Article 19, Index on Censorship

June 16: AEJ MF Rep was Panelist and Moderator at AEJ Seminar on Media Freedom and War in Ukraine: Impacts on European journalism, at European Parliament, Brussels. Reports on AEJ websites

June 29-30: Participated in Platform Partners media freedom mission in Budapest, and Meetings with senior Orban government officials (see AEJ websites articles)

**JOINT STATEMENTS** with partner organisations (EFJ, IPI, RSF, ECPMF CPJ etc): On protecting journalists in Ukraine; Russia's political and media repression; Anti-SLAPPs campaigns; MF in Hungary; Legal harassment in Malta; EU Media Freedom Act, etc. See [www.aej.org](http://www.aej.org) and [www.aej-uk.org](http://www.aej-uk.org)

**W. HORSLEY ARTICLES** on AEJ websites: Topics include Ukraine's war and free speech; Testimony from Mariupol; Hungary's journalists' Catch 22 dilemma; campaign to free Andrei Aliaksandrau & others in Belarus, etc.

**FORTHCOMING EVENTS:** November 22: EBU Hybrid conference on “Public Media for Democracy”, Vilnius, Lithuania – Info and Register via [Public Service Media for Democracy \(coe.int\)](https://publicservice.mediafor democracy.coe.int)