



AEJ UK CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT ON 2022

The AEJ in the UK has weathered the storms of Brexit and Covid, and seeks to extend the reach and reputation of our association as a professional and social hub for members and a centre of expertise on European affairs. I especially thank Charles Jenkins and David Worsfold for their hard work and cooperation. Also to David Barker for maintaining the UK Section website as a showcase for our events and developments of core interest to our members and the wider journalistic community; and to Firdevs Robinson, who promotes our profile on social media.

Our professional journalists' meetings with public figures and insiders are regularly attended by Regent's University students and teachers, by agreement with the university's management. Our main contacts are Leslie Viney, Lecturer in Media and Communications, and Elif Toker, who teaches Political and Crisis Communications. Regent's generously provides us with the venue for our meetings and has an excellent catering service. We must place our Deli lunch orders several days in advance.

On 4 October this year the AEJ and Regent's will jointly host a special Guest Lecture in the university's large lecture theatre, Tuke Hall. The speaker will be Lord Patten, now the Chancellor of Oxford University, whose past titles include European Commissioner, chairman of the Conservative party, and the last Governor of Hong Kong.

We keep up our important links with the Foreign Press Association, the London Press Club, and NGOs concerned with media freedom matters including the European Federation of Journalists, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), and Index on Censorship. The AEJ's efforts to counter the increasingly hostile and restrictive international environment facing journalists are shared with those of the Commonwealth Journalists Association. Our website highlights the recent decision by Commonwealth ministers to adopt a set of Media Principles, including commitments to protect journalists from targeted violence and harassment. That agreement was the result of years of intensive campaigning in cooperation with other influential professional associations and civil society groups.

AEJ meetings in 2022 have naturally focussed closely on crucial aspects of Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine, and the responses of the UK, EU, and wider international community. Our website carries a specially commissioned video report by Sergiy Tomilenko, the head of Ukraine's National Union of Journalists, showing how Ukrainian journalists risk their lives to report on the war while striving to uphold the best standards of journalistic integrity and independence during an existential crisis for the country. In 2023, the UK Section will explore ways in which we could offer meaningful support to Ukrainian journalists, and show solidarity with the dozens of Belarusian journalists who have become political prisoners under Lukashenko's oppressive dictatorship simply for practising journalism and asserting universal fundamental rights.

Last April, AEJ members attended the House of Commons Panel event presenting Defending Press Freedom in Times of Tension and Conflict , <https://rm.coe.int/platform-protection-of-journalists-annual-report-2022/1680a64fe> , the Annual Report of the 15 partner organisations of the Council of Europe’s online Safety of Journalists Platform www.coe.int/fom . I spoke for the AEJ alongside representatives of Article 19 and Index on Censorship. The AEJ is a founding member of the Platform, a unique “early warning and rapid response” system in which hundreds of media freedom alerts are reported each year and trigger messages from the Council of Europe’s Secretariat to member states calling for remedial actions to remove threats to media freedom. The Platform partners’ annual reports are significant drivers of action-oriented policies for the Council of Europe and the European Union aimed at reversing the well-documented backsliding in states’ fulfilment of their legal and political commitments in the field of freedom of expression and media freedom, independence and pluralism.

For the AEJ, I and others are again closely involved in preparing the 2023 Annual Report of the Platform partners, which is to be published and launched at one or more public events, starting with the main international presentation scheduled to take place in Brussels in late February. AEJ members are invited to join such events in person or online.

The International AEJ:

In June 2022, David Worsfold and I represented the Section at a one-day event sponsored by the European Parliament in coordination with the AEJ and held in the parliament’s Brussels building, with the participation of several MEPs and AEJ members from a dozen national sections. The topics included the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, recent developments in the struggle for media freedom in Europe, and the institutional “future of Europe” debate. I spoke in one panel discussion and moderated another. David <https://aej-uk.org/2022/06/17/changing-attitudes/> and I <https://aej-uk.org/2022/06/17/3502/> both wrote reports about significant trends that emerged from the discussions.

After many years as the international AEJ’s Media Freedom Representative, and eight years as a member of the international AEJ Board, for personal and professional reasons I handed that role over, at the time of the AEJ Congress in November, to Kyriakos Pierides, a well-respected Greek Cypriot journalist. My final Annual Report in that capacity has been circulated to UK members. I shall remain active in the work of the Platform and other media freedom activities.

In October David Worsfold led a 4-person UK Section delegation to the AEJ Congress in Greece. Pat Humphreys, a long-standing AEJ member who is currently a member of the UK Section, was elected to be the international AEJ Treasurer for two years, and therefore a member of the international Board. Congratulations to Pat on his new role.

William Horsley London, 7 January 2023