

AEJ UK Section Annual General Meeting
Duke of Clarence Pub, London SW5 0BE, 11.30 am, 31st January 2024
Minutes

Attendance. Chairman: William Horsley. Secretary: Charles Jenkins. Treasurer: David Worsfold. Website Manager: David Barker. Social Media Editor: Firdevs Robinson. There were 15 members present. Apologies were received from 7 others.

Chairmans's Report. (Attached). William opened the meeting by welcoming the members present and touching on the international context of growing conflicts, tensions and information wars which place heightened responsibility on the role of journalists everywhere. Political and military figures had spoken recently of the world entering a "pre-war situation". The AEJ would remain committed to playing an active part in promoting informed public debate through our professional meetings, as well as advocacy in partnership with international organisations like the Council of Europe, which recently started an unprecedented Europe-wide campaign to counter acute threats to press freedom and democratic values; the international AEJ is an integral partner of the campaign and of the ground-breaking online monitoring and reporting mechanism, the *Platform for the safety of journalists* <http://fom/coe/int> .

Regent's University has hosted our regular lunchtime meetings, ever since Brexit prevented us from using rooms at Europe House. But due to the university's own senior management decisions we can no longer book meeting rooms directly ourselves at the University. Instead we must rely on the good offices of individual Faculty staff members who teach classes of students in international relations and other subjects. This makes the advance planning of meetings with busy public speakers more complicated and less flexible. For the time being we may also be limited to holding our meetings only during the university's term times. The picture would become clearer in the coming weeks, William said. In any case the changed conditions would make it hard to replicate the successful October 2023 Patten lecture event which was jointly hosted by the AEJ and Regent's University with strong support from its Vice Chancellor.

Meanwhile, since Covid times many journalists have had less freedom to attend in-person meetings during the working day. Attendance by British and international journalists at recent events has been good. But it may become necessary to look elsewhere to hold occasional AEJ meetings and the going commercial rates to hire a suitable space are prohibitive. For the time being, with two meetings already publicised on our website (on the impact of AI and the political landscape of Europe in a crucial election year) , the hope is to have four to five meetings in the first half of 2024 and at least two in the second half when Regent's operates for fewer weeks. These may be supplemented by occasional online meetings which would make it possible to have interactive meetings with speakers abroad.

William highlighted the greatly improved appearance and contents on the AEJ UK website, managed by David Barker, which earned plaudits from members present; and the section's social media presence, curated by Firdevs Robinson.

Secretary's Report. (Attached). Charles Jenkins invited a discussion of topic and themes of interest to members later in 2024. He outlined several promising contacts already made with potential speakers on themes including the international repercussions after two years of war in Ukraine; and the disastrous consequences of events still unfolding in the Middle East. Other suitable subjects of attention raised were the critical decline in states' respect for media freedom and international law, the agenda of "the global south", and the coming US presidential election.

An exchange followed about the merits and practicality of expanding the AEJ's use of hybrid or online meetings. There were valid arguments for trying to enable AEJ members or others outside London to take part. But in-person meetings remain the preferred mainstay of the Section's activities, and our past experience of hosting hybrid events at Regent's had been mixed despite help from Regent's technical

support staff. David Worsfold undertook to seek further advice with a view to setting up a simple way of enabling some remote participation or live streaming of some meetings, It was felt that the idea of charging a modest fee for online participation would likely not be worth the trouble.

As for the possibility of developing close links with another university or like-minded organisation which might be willing to host or co-host some AEJ meetings as a back-up to our current arrangements, Martyn Bond mentioned two universities in central London as potential organisations to have initial contacts with. William welcomed the initiative to explore any such options tentatively, on the understanding that such an arrangement must rest on a solid basis of goodwill and any additional costs should be kept to a minimum.

Martyn also suggested that the AEJ-UK might seek ‘click-through’ agreements with the websites of like-minded institutions. Other organisations would by agreement put links to the AEJ on their websites in return for reciprocal arrangements on our own site. In that way the AEJ, its content and activities would become better known, possibly reaching out to potential new members as well. Martyn named five possible candidate organisations which could be approached. Martyn agreed to share details in writing as a first step so that the AEJ-UK could look at taking it forward.

International AEJ Congress. David Worsfold reminded members about the International AEJ’s plans to hold the 2024 Congress and General Assembly in Catania, Sicily, in October. So far seven UK members had expressed initial interest in attending. William and David invited the meeting to agree to make Llewellyn King and his wife Linda honorary members of the UK Section in recognition of their role as long-standing friends of the AEJ’ Llewellyn is one-time guest speaker at a UK section meeting. He is a distinguished US-based columnist and presenter of syndicated TV programme *The White House Chronicle*, and Linda is his wife and producer. They have long been regular participants at international AEJ Congresses and hope to join the 2024 Congress as well.

Treasurer’s Report. (Correct Version Attached). David said he expected the section’s finances to roughly break even in 2024, in contrast to 2023 when a deficit of £1,057 was recorded because of an exceptional outlay on necessary website and IT expenditure. A moderate loss also arose from the lunchtime meetings. David hoped that catering would be broadly in balance this year following a decision last year to stop serving wine at lunches. Current circumstances justified holding the annual membership fee at £40 for 2024. However, inflationary pressures suggested that a rise might be advisable for 2025. A notional increase could take it to £45 or £50. No decision was yet called for, but several members indicated support for an increase if necessary.

Ukraine: William and Martyn put forward a proposal to repeat last year’s invitation to members to contribute on an individual voluntary basis to an AEJ Fund in support of Ukrainian journalists who are suffering high risks and hardship because of Russia’s military aggression. Unlike last year, when UK members voted to include an additional sum from the Section’s assets – bringing the total to over 1,500 euros -- this time the fund would consist of individual donations only. Last year the donation was gratefully received and acknowledged by RSF (Reporters Without Borders) which used it to provide personal and material protection for Ukrainian journalists and media. This time William proposed to channel members’ donations in response to an appeal from Ukraine’s main journalists’ union, the NUJU, through the International Federation of Journalists. A question was raised whether the AEJ might also consider raising money in support of journalists at great risk in Gaza. Members expressed their horror at the unprecedented death toll and alleged targeting of journalists in Gaza under Israeli bombardment, but felt that the AEJ’s priority for such a joint fund-raising effort should be with supporting colleagues in Ukraine.

Attracting new members: The meeting discussed ways to attract new AEJ members, especially among younger, working journalists. The Foreign Press Association regularly informs its members about our meetings and a number of them often take part. While whole classes of Regent’s university students often attend our meetings they are unlikely, as mostly temporary UK residents, to have an active interest in joining. The Section currently has one member in the under-25 category and others are encouraged to attend

meetings as a first step. Martyn Bond pointed out that Zoom events can reach journalists and potential members who are don't have time to travel to in-person meetings.

Election of Officers: The existing Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer stood without opponents and were elected *nem con*. William Horsley was proposed as chairman by Rick Thompson and seconded by Peter Norman. For treasurer, Martyn Bond proposed David Worsfold who was seconded by Michael Hornsby. Quentin Peel proposed Charles Jenkins who was seconded by Firdevs Robinson.

After 90 minutes, the meeting concluded with a resounding vote of thanks for the officers as well as others who have contributed to running the AEJ-UK, investing much time and effort in an unpaid, voluntary capacity.

Ends