

## **AEJ UK CHAIRMAN – 2023 ANNUAL REPORT**

A major highlight of the past year was the Distinguished Lecturer event with Lord Chris Patten which the AEJ organised jointly with Regent's University on 4 October. It attracted a large audience of international journalists, writers and university staff and students and raised the AEJ's profile accordingly. But near the end of 2023 we learned that due to a high-level management decision by the university the AEJ's privileged status as an outside 'partner organisation' with the right to reserve Meeting Rooms ourselves will be restricted. From now on we must rely on members of the university's teaching staff to make reservations for AEJ lunchtime meetings on our behalf.

This will make the process more complicated and cumbersome. But with strong support from Leslie Viney (Media and Film) and Elif Toker (Political Communications) we expect to be able to continue benefiting as before from the pro bono use of Regent's meeting spaces for the foreseeable future. The AGM is being held in a different location this year, and from time to time it may be necessary for us to hold regular professional meetings elsewhere in case Regent's cannot accommodate our needs.

I am grateful to Charles Jenkins, David Worsfold and Peter Norman for helping to make the Patten event a big success. The quality of our speakers and the value of AEJ membership depends on the voluntary and unpaid efforts of a few. All members are encouraged to give thought to how they may be able to give practical assistance, either to attract high quality speakers in consultation with the elected officers, or to encourage new -- especially younger -- members to join the Section.

The international AEJ Congress in Albania was a memorable opportunity to see the country's fast development and its attractions as a destination for discerning visitors. Full reports on the presentations and debates at the Congress and General Assembly, and the eye-opening programme of activities in the coastal city of Vlore and around are published on the AEJ UK website.

David Barker did a fine job again in 2023 of keeping the website updated and stocked with news and views about our activities and topics of special interest to journalists. Likewise, Firdevs Robinson continued to update and curate our social media presence. Members who are active on social media are urged to tweet and re-tweet posts at every opportunity.

I continue to represent the AEJ in media freedom related activities with the Council of Europe, including the Europe-wide monitoring and reporting mechanism – the *Platform for the safety of journalists* [www.coe.int/fom](http://www.coe.int/fom) -- and the Europe-wide *Journalists Matter* campaign (2023-2027) which was launched in Riga, Latvia, in October 2023. The AEJ is a founding member of the 15-member Platform, along with the European Federation of Journalists, International Press Institute, Reporters Without Borders and Article 19.

The Partner organisations cooperate to submit hundreds of alerts each year and deals directly with the governments concerned to bring about remedial actions. The Platform partners also publish authoritative annual reports which assist the Council of Europe and the EU to develop policies to strengthen protections for free and independent journalism.

In early March 2024 AEJ members will be invited to join a hybrid event marking the publication of the 2024 Annual Report and related advocacy activities. Our website [www.aej-uk.org](http://www.aej-uk.org) carries news and analysis of AEJ activities and written reports by members on the topical European and international issues addressed by Guest Speakers at our regular professional meetings.

**William Horsley, 10 January 2024**